49 pages of tutorials inside!

Crafting sci-fi scenes

Geoffrey Ernault uses gradients and brushwork techniques to communicate visual direction

Top tips for creating narratives

Mike Azevedo explores lighting methods to build on characters and atmosphere

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SKETCHING TO EXPLORE 3D FORMS

Kurt Papstein shares his sketchbook and how it helps form his 3D sculptures

Gabriel Romero
Using simple brushes to hone your painting skills

Mastering
sci-fi concepts

Derek Stenning talks about the idea behind his EK series and his future freelance ventures

+plus

• 10 of the best digital artworks
• **Learn to paint with photo textures**
• Bringing video game characters to life
• **and much more!**

Editor's Letter

JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

Welcome to the February issue of *2dartist* magazine!

If you're not already familiar with master concept artist Derek Stenning, now's your chance! Derek reveals the idea behind his retro sci-fi masterpieces, including this issues stunning cover art, over on page 06. This is one not to be missed!

Find out how to improve your painting skills using three simple brushes, with the help of experienced concept artist Gabriel Romero. And we have all your other regular favorites – including interviews, tutorials and a collection of works from some of the top artists in the digital world today.

It's a pretty good start for embarking on your own creative journey!

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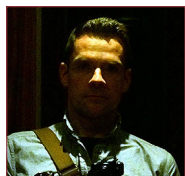 vimeo.com/layerpaint
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Contributors

DEREK STENNING
Derek Stenning, a freelance concept artist and illustrator, has been a production artist in the games industry for a decade. Over the years he has worked on projects for Nintendo, Microsoft and Activision.

CALUM ALEXANDER WATT
Calum Alexander Watt is a concept artist specializing in character work and cinematics. He has worked on *Halo 4* and his most recent clients include DC Entertainment, Armature Studios, Disney and SEGA.

KURT PAPSTEIN
Kurt's passion lies in creating compelling characters and creatures. For the last five years he has worked as a sculptor, concept designer and teacher creating new and exciting monsters for film and games.
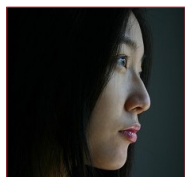
DONGLU YU
Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. Donglu has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, and *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*.

JP ROLDAN
Juan Pablo Roldan originally worked as an art director in an advertising agency, but decided to switch to being a freelance concept artist. He now has fun designing characters and environment concepts.

RICHARD TILBURY
Originally trained as a fine art painter, Richard Tilbury now works as a freelance concept artist and illustrator and has contributed to many notable published works, following his in-house role at 3dtotal.com.

MIKE AZEVEDO
Mike Azevedo is a Brazilian illustrator and concept artist, having recently graduated in game design. He's currently working for Applibot and on unreleased Brazilian animations.
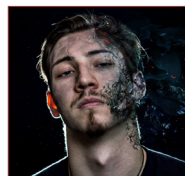
GEOFFREY ERNAULT
Geoffrey Ernault is working as a freelance concept artist in games and movies. He is currently working on his portfolio in order to get the chance to move abroad to an awesome company!

GABRIEL LEONARDO ROMERO
Gabriel Romero is a freelance illustrator and matte painter, working on projects for TV commercials, films and games. He is passionate about aero-modeling and discusses how to develop your painting skills.

B. BÖRKUR EIRÍKSSON
B. Börkur Eiríksson graduated from WDKA Rotterdam in 2004 with a BA degree in Animation/Illustration. He works as the art director for EVE IP at CCP Games and has been working on *EVE-Online* since 2004.
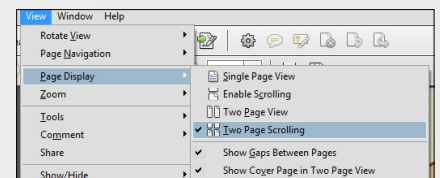
Your Magazine.
Get the most out of it!

If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing

For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: **DOWNLOAD**

To view the many double-page spreads featured in 2dartist magazine, you can set the reader to display "two-up", which will show double-page spreads as one large landscape image:

1. Open the magazine in Reader;
2. Go to the **View** menu, then **Page Display**;
3. Select **Two Page Scrolling**, making sure that **Show Cover Page in Two Page View** is also selected.

Jump to articles

In the Contents pages, we have direct links to all articles within the magazine. If a certain article catches your eye, simply click (or tap on handheld devices) on the page number within the Contents, and you will be taken straight to that article.

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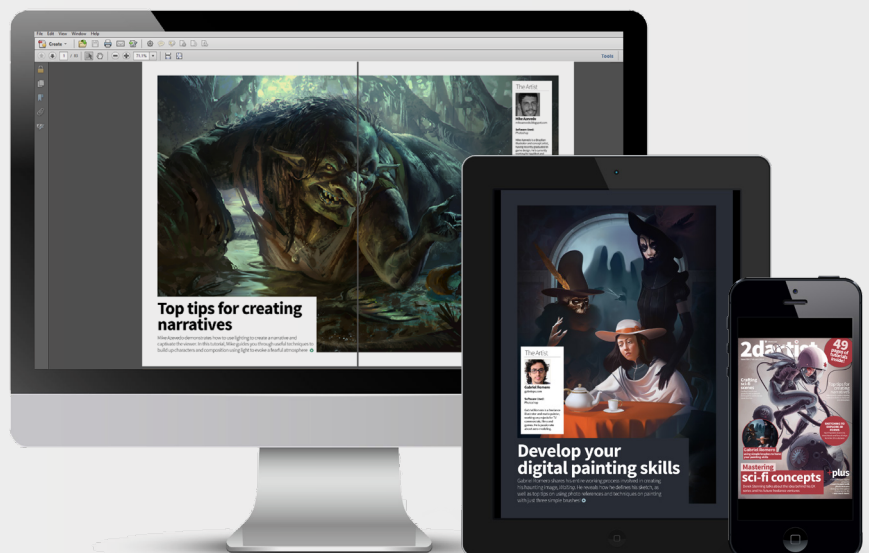
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06

The Artist

Derek Stenning

Web: borninconcrete.com

Interviewed by:
Jess Serjent-Tipping

Derek Stenning, a freelance concept artist and illustrator, has been a production artist in the games industry for a decade. Over the years he has worked on various projects for Marvel Entertainment, Nintendo, Microsoft, SEGA and Activision.

Mastering sci-fi concepts

With over a decade of experience in the game industry and now a fresh start in freelance, Derek shares his experiences, advice and what the future has in store for him! ▶

entartete kunst **DIE STERNE** (kaiser)

Veteran concept artist and illustrator, Derek Stenning, has worked in the games industry for a decade as a production artist at studios such as Blackbox Games and NGL works. During this time he has worked on titles such as *Captain America* and *Spiderman FOF*.

After graduating from animation school and a short stint in that industry, Derek moved to a studio in Reykjavik where he had the opportunity to move into games. At this point, Derek worked as a concept artist for a few companies in Vancouver where he really found his place in the industry, and found that doing production art for games allowed him more creativity and overall a larger impact on the final product!

Over the years since then, Derek has largely stayed in the games industry where he has worked on some great projects for clients such as Marvel Entertainment, Nintendo, Microsoft and SEGA.

He now lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with his wife and two children. With an enjoyment for subtle muted color schemes, beer and an affinity for Imperial German headgear, Derek talks to us about the transition to freelance, the inspiration behind his EK series and what the future holds...

2dartist: You've worked both for studios (Next Level Games and Microsoft Studios) and now you're freelance; could you tell us a bit about your decision to go freelance and the transition?

Derek Stenning: The decision was kind of made out of necessity. When I started working at Microsoft we were working on amazing stuff, but over the time I was there, those amazing projects began to change a lot and became more and more uninteresting.

As things got worse over a period of several months I came to the decision to leave. My wife and I wanted to stay in Victoria for a while but there wasn't a lot of employment options there for a concept artist so I had to go freelance or look elsewhere for work. So we decided to stay in Victoria and I let my contacts in the industry know that I was available for work.

The transition was pretty easy; I started working for Next Level immediately, and then I picked up work from a few other companies. It was a little weird working from home at first – being away from a studio environment – but I'm getting used to it and being able to walk the kids to school in the morning is pretty sweet.

DIE QUALLEN {müll}
Enartete Kunst
Number: 30/33
Madness becomes method
Method becomes madness.

● This piece was featured in the latest (20th) edition of Spectrum Fantastic Art

2da: How did you get in contact with the ARTISHOX Art Agency? What advice can you give novice artists seeking representation?

DS: Ben from ARTISHOX contacted me after seeing my work online and we started working together. I had work permanently on exhibit in his gallery in Hasselt, Belgium, and we did some other shows, and we sold some prints but unfortunately he had to shut down his gallery for health/personal reasons. ▶

ENTARTETE KUNST 32
THE GREAT GEOMETER

Inspired by the work of English writer John Michell, this was one of the more complex and labor intensive pieces in the series

● **Created for inclusion in the art book: Schwarz Auf Weiss Vol. 2**

"I use the name 'Born In Concrete' to represent the idea of following your path, your bliss, your true will"

As for advice, make sure that you are on the same page in terms of aesthetics, values, and what you want to achieve out of the collaboration. Plus, you should have a clear contract outlining what each party will provide and be responsible for.

2da: Of the different exhibitions that you've had, which one is the most memorable and why? Which was the worst/hardest? What did you learn from it?

DS: The most memorable show for me was the first State of the Art show I participated in up in Whistler. A bunch of my friends came up from Vancouver, and my friend Rory Doyle was also in the show so it was like a big party. The Art of Illustration show I did at the Cannon Gallery was also great, as it was an honor to exhibit with amazing artists like Dave Palumbo, David Meng, Omar Ryan, Stephan Martiniere and so on.

I don't think I've had a worst exhibition. I have done a number of group shows in Germany and Belgium, but I haven't been able to attend these shows and have only seen pictures of those shows after the fact, or after opening night, so I guess in a way those shows haven't been as exciting or as engaging.

2da: What is your favorite book? Why? How has it affected/influenced/shaped you?

DS: That is a hard one, as I don't know if I can narrow it down to one book. My literary/scholarly influences are more of a patchwork and I think they would certainly focus on the works of authors as opposed to individual books, and each of these authors have influenced various aspects of me over the years.

But to try and name a few: Chomsky for instilling a healthy level of cynicism and for breaking out of the western paradigm; Colin Wilson for teaching me how to see and live in the moment and the work of Aleister Crowley for inspiration and reinforcing the belief in following one's passion to achieve growth and fulfillment.

2da: Tell us about the idea behind the EK series and the birth of the name "Born In Concrete"?

DS: Spending 10 years as a production artist had narrowed my view of my art. I found all my personal work taking the form of production art and I even began to think that production art,

ALLE BEWACHT VON MACHINES OF LOVING GRACE

ENTARTETE KUNST

● Inspired by the Adam Curtis documentary of the same name, this piece is another favorite of the series

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⚡ PRO TIP
Follow your own path

Following trends is fine and it is a good way to try out new styles and techniques, but I've always had the most success (and the most fun) when I've followed my own instincts, looked within and created the work that I wanted to create. It may be harder at first to find that inspiration and it may take a little courage to do things your own way, but the end results will be more meaningful and rewarding.

with its inherent complexities (telling a story, eliciting a particular emotion, incorporation game mechanics, fitting into a particular art style, and so on) was somehow a higher form of art.

The EK series was about smashing these ideas, getting past them by creating work that had no story, no specific characters, and getting back to creating my own art. ▶

INSOLENT MOCKERY OF THE DIVINE UNDER CENTRIST RULE

Inspired by one of the deriding slogans from the 1937 Entartete Kunst exhibit, this one is a favorite in the series

I use the name 'Born In Concrete' to represent the idea of following your path, your bliss, your true will, whatever you want to call it – the idea of doing what you were meant to do. I'm not claiming that the artwork I create is my sole purpose for existing, but I feel compelled to create my personal work and I can't imagine doing anything else work-wise, so I feel the title is apt.

2da: *Born In Concrete: The EK Series* is your first book, what experiences and skills have you gained from the process of putting it all together?

DS: The book is meant to finish off the EK series and is in a way the final piece in the project. As such I wanted to have as much input on the book as possible, and Design Studio Press was great, giving me as much creative freedom to do with the book what I wanted. I handled the design and layout, running my work by DSP for feedback, and they took care of everything on the production/publishing end. It was a lot of work but it was also a lot of fun.

2da: The book features a section that covers the process and techniques that you use to create a piece from start to finish, could you give us a break down of what this entails?

DS: I had done a step-by-step painting tutorial for Imagine FX a few years back that I had received positive feedback for, so I thought it would be nice to include something similar in the book. DSP were very supportive of including a process or tutorial section in the book, because they publish educational art books as well and they figured this would help the book appeal to their target audience.

The section itself starts with the idea, the initial sketch and then integrates the 3D elements and material textures. These last two techniques were integrated into my creative process during the creation of this series as a way to overcome my aversion to using them. From there I go through my painting process, then I cover a few tips and tricks I use to finish off these pieces.

2da: How has working on video game design changed your approach to your own work? What have you learned during paid work that you can apply to personal work?

DS: I don't know how much it has changed my approach to my personal work. It certainly has changed my ability to execute on my personal work, to faithfully recreate the images that I see in my head. Spending 40 hours every week cranking out concept art and other content gives you a lot

● **Created as part of Ventilate.ca's fifth poster series and used as a basis for a model kit produced by Industria Mechanika**

of time to work on your skills. It also introduces you to new styles and techniques as you work on different types of projects with different artists. Sometimes it can be difficult to work on projects that you aren't really interested in, but you can usually find an aspect of a style that you can sink your teeth into. Plus, this gives you a different outlook and an appreciation for styles that you can enjoy!

2da: Finally, what are you working on now and what can we expect to see from you in the future?

DS: I'm currently pretty slammed with concept work. I'm working on a cool new project with Next Level Games in addition to working on a few other contacts, one with a new studio starting up here in Victoria. I also have a couple of personal

commissions in the EK style going on and I have a few more EK model kits in the works with Industria Mechanika.

I'm also laying down the ground work on a couple of new personal projects, trying to find time to work on them and waiting to see which one I will become more interested in as I don't have the time to work on both. Hopefully my work schedule will slow down by late spring/early summer so I can get started. Until then you can keep up with what is going on with me at my blog, **www.borninconcrete.blogspot.com**, or at my website, **www.borninconcrete.com**.

2da: Thanks for taking the time to chat with 2dartist! ●

BORN IN CONCRETE
THE EK SERIES
DEREK STENNING

⚡ PRO TIP
Cheap, Good and Fast – pick two

This is an old but good mantra for the freelance artist that I learned from an older, wiser work colleague many years ago. So assuming that you will always strive to create the best work you can and given that everything in this industry is needed on tight deadlines or ' in yesterday', you can feel free to charge your clients the fees you deserve!

🕐 Artist Timeline Derek's career to date

1999: Graduated from the Capilano College Commercial/Traditional Animation Program

2000: First game gig at Symbol of Reality in Reykjavik, Iceland

2001: Move to Blackbox Games in Vancouver (later EA Blackbox)

2002: Helped to start up Next Level Games (NLG) in Vancouver

2003–2011: NLG works: *Mario Strikers*, *Captain America*, *Spiderman FOF*, *Luigi's Mansion*

2009: Starts working on personal work again: EK Series

2009–present: EK Series work featured in numerous group exhibitions and publications

2012: Moved to Microsoft Studios in Victoria

2013: First art book, *Born In Concrete: The EK Series*, published by DSP

2014: Goes freelance/contract, starts working on new personal work
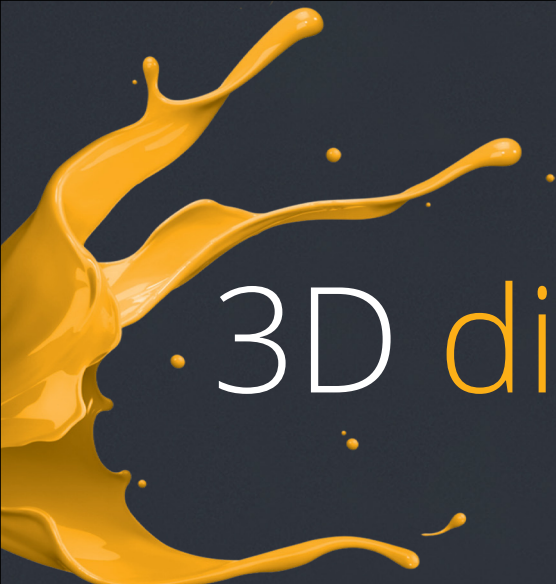
Created with
MARI

3D digital painting

Now available on Mac

THE FOUNDRY.
thefoundry.co.uk/mari

Imagined by
Justin Holt

The Artist
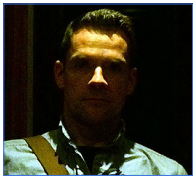
Calum Alexander Watt
calumalexanderwatt.com

Interviewed by:
Jess Serjent-Tipping

Calum Alexander Watt is a concept artist specializing in character work and cinematics. His most recent clients include DC Entertainment, Armature Studios, Disney and SEGA.

Bringing video game characters to life

With an extensive career in the game industry under his belt, Calum Alexander Watt shares his experiences and advice, and reveals what to expect from starting his new chapter with Improbable ▶

Master concept artist, Calum Alexander Watt kickstarted his impressive career as a comic artist working on strips such as *Judge Dredd* and *Rogue Trooper* for 2000AD. After a few years Calum made his way into the game industry working in all aspects of development from environments to characters and storyboards. This is where he produced acclaimed concept art for the unreleased *Metallica: The Game*, a project that still gets mentioned by his clients today!

Moving into a period of freelancing, Calum worked on art for high profile games including *Halo 4* for Microsoft Studios, *ALIEN: Isolation* for Creative Assembly, and *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate* for Armature Studios. About to start his new role as concept artist with

Improbable, we catch up with Calum to talk experience, highlights and the future!

2dartist: Could you tell us about your creative process and the software that you use?

Calum Alexander Watt: More often than not I will be working from a written brief. I will look for appropriate references and research where possible. From here I will start sketching in Autodesk Sketchbook Pro, perhaps creating three or four alternate takes on a particular character. I will then fire these back to the art director who will review and suggest revisions and refinement. Once we are happy with a particular concept, we may take this on to a 'material' render if required. In Sketchbook Pro I will paint the character up with emphasis on the lighting, fabric and texture.

⚡ PRO TIP

Reference

I'm a big fan of reference. Quite controversial, but don't be afraid to gather photo reference for sketching from. We don't always have access to live models, but with mobile phones, it's easy to quickly set up a pose, snap away and use for reference. For *Blackgate* I posed for everyone from Batman to the Joker, Penguin and Bane – don't worry though, my wife posed for Catwoman!

● *Blakbox* from 2012. Personal piece made with Sketchbook Pro

● *Team Avalon* **from 2005. This is a line-up for an unpublished title**

2da: What do you feel is most important part of this process that you like to focus on?

CAW: While the painting part of the process tends to be the most dramatic area artistically, it really is all about the idea. Problem solving and visually describing an idea with an understandable image is the very definition of my role, so for me the initial sketch and refinement are the key stages. By nature I am a draughtsman foremost, then a painter (digitally speaking) so the early sketches are the most exciting and energizing part of the process for me.

2da: You have worked on some big games such as *Halo 4* and *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate*, can you tell us about some of your experiences of working on titles such as these?

CAW: For *Halo 4* and *Batman* I created frames for high-end animatics. Working with Todd Keller

at Armature on *Batman* was a great experience. This was very intensive work, as each frame was separated into groups that could be individually animated and filtered. I hand drew over 350 frames for *Batman*, but luckily the animation was someone else's job!

2da: What has been your favorite project to work on and why?

CAW: I've always been a big fan of *Batman*, so to be able to contribute to a small part of his world was fantastic. *ALIEN: Isolation* is a favorite too. To revisit the concept work of Moebius, Ron Cobb and Chris Foss from the original 1979 movie as inspiration was fantastic. My concepts relied heavily on John Mollo's incredible costume designs. The biggest task was to design a future from a 1970s perspective without becoming forced or clichéd. We stuck closely to the original film aesthetic which remains timeless.

2da: How has working on video game design changed your approach to your own work? What have you learned during paid work that you can apply to personal work?

CAW: Speed and a thick skin are pretty essential in the world of concept design. I learned the hard way regarding the latter. Concept art is all about problem solving; if someone doesn't like your design you must move on and design again! It's not personal, it's just the problem hasn't been solved yet! And as for speed, a combination of approach and the brushes one uses really helps. But I also practice. A LOT.

2da: What is your favorite video game? And how has it affected/influenced/shaped you?

CAW: I will always have a fond memory of my early gaming experience. Titles like *Sabrewulf*, *Alien Highway*, *Starquake* and *Loderunner* on ▶

🕐 **Artist Timeline** Calum's career to this day

1996: First published *Judge Dredd* work, 10 pages for special edition

1998: Purchased first computer and Wacom tablet. The start of his digital education

2000: Generalist artist for Climax Racing Studio

2004: Created concepts for proposed Metallica game. These concepts are still referenced by clients today

2008: Lead character artist with Pure. Designed and managed character work for a racing title

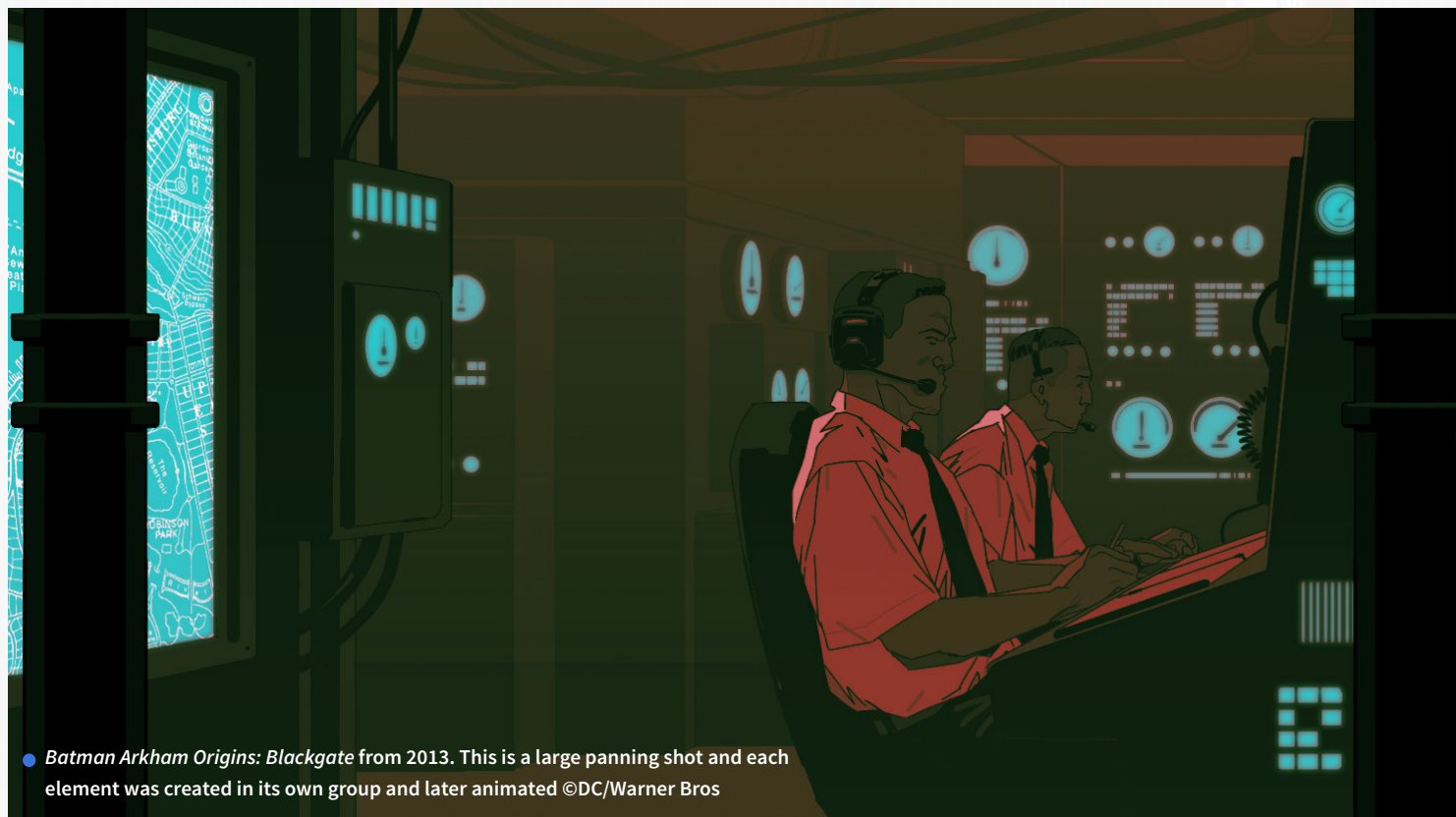**2010:** Lead storyboard artist with Split Second II

2011: Freelance concept artist. Worked on *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate*, *Halo 4*, *ALIEN: Isolation*.

2014: Concept artist with Improbable

● *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate* from 2013. This is a large panning shot and each element was created in its own group and later animated ©DC/Warner Bros

● *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate* from 2013. The studio chose a minimal 'noir' palette for the cinematics, but Calum added the color lining to Blackmask's jacket to pop from the frame and give him some added personality ©DC/Warner Bros
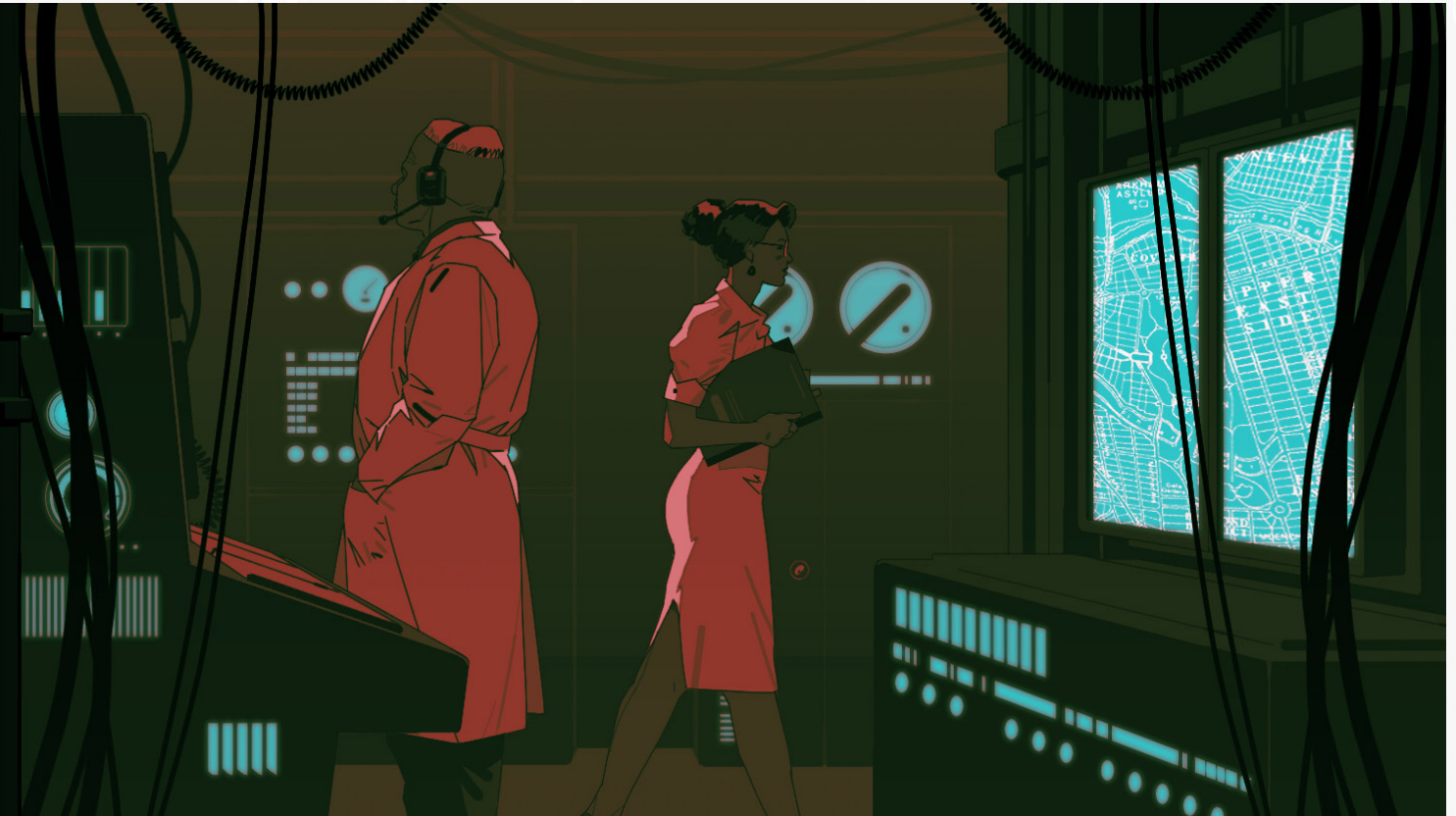

⚡ PRO TIP
R & D

Even fantasy projects can benefit from some real world reality. We live in an amazingly diverse and rich world. From historical dress to tribal costumes and street clothing, to minute algae or Russian spacecraft – there's so much to inspire, influence and inform the artist. Read books, visit museums, travel. Observe and absorb!

● *Batman Arkham Origins: Black-gate* from 2013. Calum enjoyed depicting all the Batman villains, but enjoyed Catwoman the most ©DC/Warner Bros

the Spectrum (yes I am that old!) planted the seed of my later career path. Later games such as *Tomb Raider* and *Ocarina of Time* reawakened that experience and prompted my move into the game industry.

2da: You have just joined new London studio, Improbable. Can you tell us what it is about

the studio that made you take the jump from freelancing to full-time?

CAW: The ideas that Improbable approached me with were more than enough to convince me to make the jump from freelancing. The potential and inspiring scope of the development are very tantalizing, I'm excited to be contributing to

their ongoing projects. As a freelancer one must juggle many ideas for many clients. This can be fun and rewarding, but can also be an exhausting experience creatively. Often there is little time for research and development and turnaround of ideas must be necessarily quick. I'm looking forward to focusing my creativity towards our single yet massive endeavor! ▶

● *Batman Arkham Origins: Blackgate* from 2013. Line-up and tattoo designs for the Penguin's gang © DC/Warner Bros

● Damage Inc from 2004. Concept for *Metallica* game. This project helped to define Calum's approach to concepting

● **Damage Inc from 2004. Concept for *Metallica* game**

2da: What sort of projects do you hope to be working on at Improbable? And can you tell us about any of them yet?

CAW: I can't say too much at this time, but we have some very impressive ideas in development. There is huge potential for play at Improbable, with the scope for gameplay and player immersion on a level that has never been seen before. For me this is really exciting as an artist – a new world that needs a completely new aesthetic. An ecology designed and populated from the ground up.

**2da:** Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

CAW: Keep an eye out for Improbable and all the exciting developments we have there. We have a fantastic technology base that is going to allow us to push things for our own projects but potentially for the wider industry too. Beyond that I will continue to develop my own art and hopefully progress as an artist.

2da: Thanks for chatting to 2dartist! ●

KURT PAPSTEIN

Sketchbook

Kurt Papstein not only uses his sketchbook to escape into a stylized cartoon world, but also to enhance his understanding of light and form for his 3D sculptures. Kurt shares some of these pages of random mutants, aliens and dinosaurs with us!

The Artist
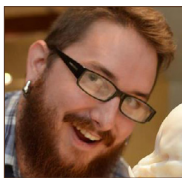
Kurt Papstein
ikameka.blogspot.com

Kurt's passion lies in creating compelling characters and creatures. For the last five years he has worked as a sculptor, concept designer and teacher creating new and exciting monsters for film and games.

Escape into the creature filled pages of Kurt's sketchbook…

As a 3D artist primarily, I find myself working with clay and polygons the majority of the time. I've found myself discussing the value of drawing with other artists and whether it is necessary for 3D artists to pursue such things. There are just as many opinions on the subject as there are artists in the field but, for what it's worth, let me give you my two cents.

Inspiration and ideas

Drawing and 3D go hand in hand. Each medium inspires and educates the other by exercising your brain in different ways. Design, aesthetics,

lighting, value, form and anatomy all grow from these tools. I couldn't imagine being an artist without exploring both of these avenues.

Every time I sit down to work in 3D, I see something new that I can incorporate into my drawings and paintings. It allows for easy exploration of form overall; to see how light works with that form, helping you to easily translate those ideas graphically onto paper. When I'm drawing however, especially in my sketchbook, I end up exploring the ridiculous and the silly most of the time.

The majority of my sketchbook work is heavily styled; more 'cartoony' than my sculpture work.

For me, my sketchbook is a fantastic escape into the absurd and crazy. I like to approach each page or session with a theme, or a specific goal to improve on – you can make a lot of progress and learn a lot from repetition.

Finally, always remember that when you are drawing it is important to make sounds and talk like the subject you are creating! It makes everyone stare at you though, so be careful of your surroundings. ●
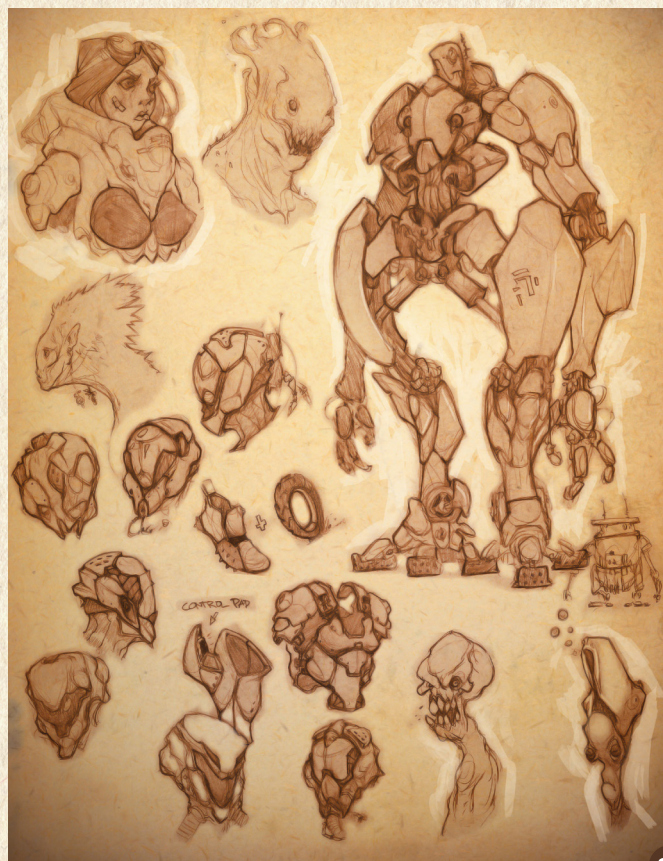
All images © Kurt Papstein

01

01 A page of pretty and not-so-pretty faces. All from imagination, apart from the girl at the top in the middle.

02 I felt bad after I drew that Alien in a suit; it was just such a silly idea. The other one seems fine with it though.

04

05

06

03 "Shamanistic aliens could be a pretty cool idea," I thought to myself one day and this collection of sketches came about as a result of that idea. Pretty cool indeed!

04 A dinosaur with feathers is an amazing concept, it seems so wrong but science says otherwise. So I put some on different species of Ceratops for different climates.

05 Mechs and helmets! I always imagined the alien to the bottom right to be the equivalent of a birthday clown, but with a bubble machine helmet. He doesn't like it…

06 Some of the best work in my sketchbooks are of silly random mutants, aliens and dinosaurs. Sometimes you just want to relax and have fun, that's what my sketchbook is really all about.
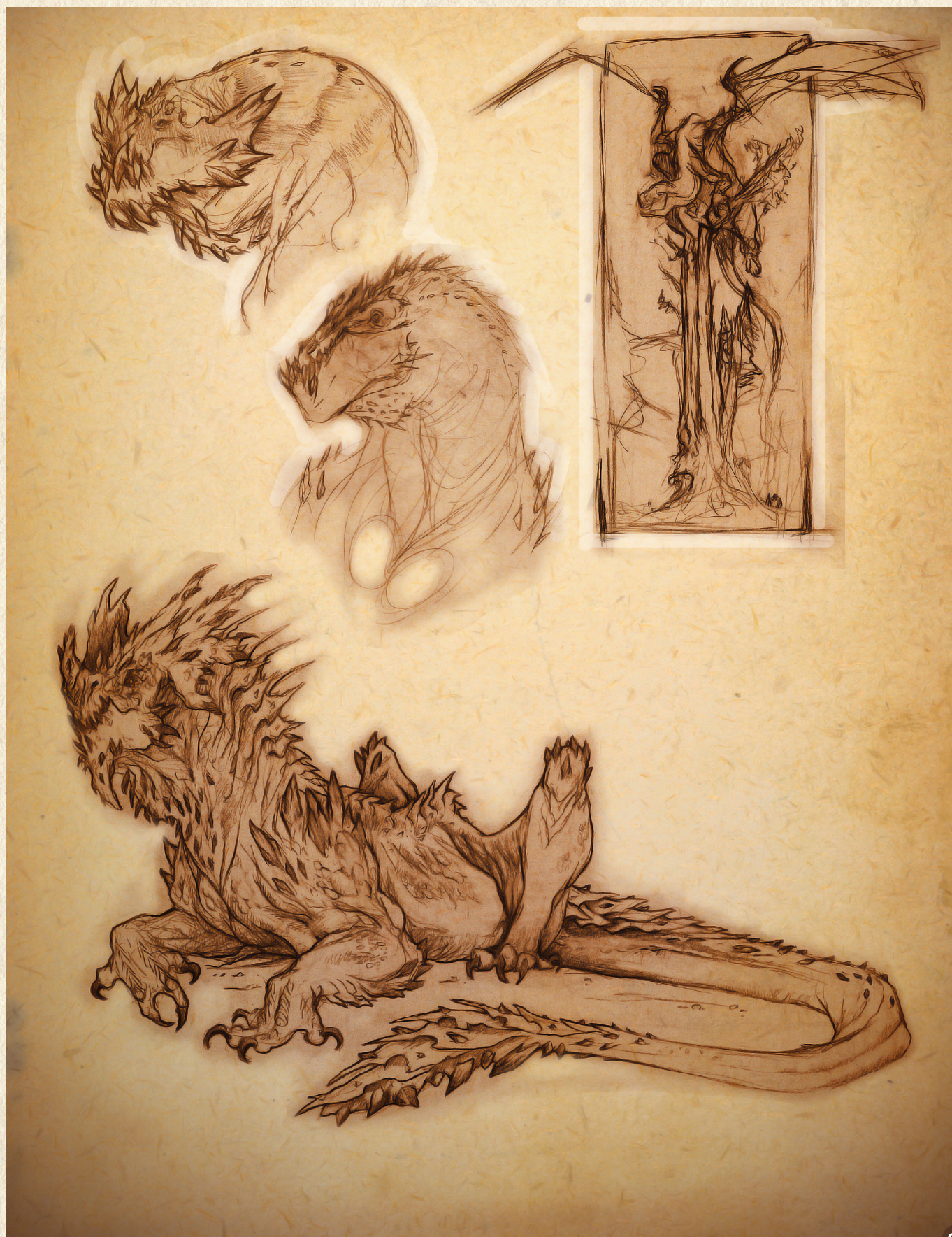
07 My wife likes my drawings of her (featured at the top), and thank goodness, because I surrounded her with a lot of gross things on this page!

08 Here's a dragon composition study. If you're looking for some good dragon references, I'd recommend searching for some images of hairless cats on the internet!

LIKE...
WHERE
ARE MY
ARMS?

07 T-Rex is super happy about something...

08 Life drawing and coffee shop caricatures. I'll let you guess which ones are from the coffee shop.

11 Birds found their way into my sketchbook one day, and I haven't been able to get them out.

12 I got everyone to look at the camera for this one, except that silly overweight fish on the bottom, he couldn't focus.

13 Drawing a Zebra from life, and also an alien ogre thing. Yes the alien ogre was actually there too.

2dartist

Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

To submit, simply email Jess at **jess@3dtotal.com** with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Art **Gallery**

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!
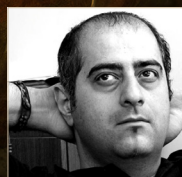
Forest

David Paget

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: davidpaget.co.uk

Submit your images! Simply email **jess@3dtotal.com**
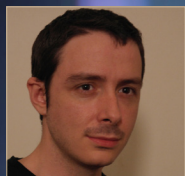
The Dwarf Master
Ali Kiani Amin
Web: facebook.com/ali.kianiamin

Lost In Memories

Andrey Andreev Gevechanov

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2013

Web: andrew-leon.cghub.com
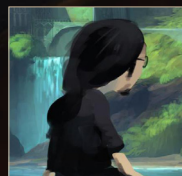
Living Planet
Klaus Pillon
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013
Web: klauspillonportfolio.carbonmade.com

The Source
Giorgio Grecu
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013
Web: shardbook.blogspot.com

The Old Castle
Jessica Rossier
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013
Web: jess-studio.com

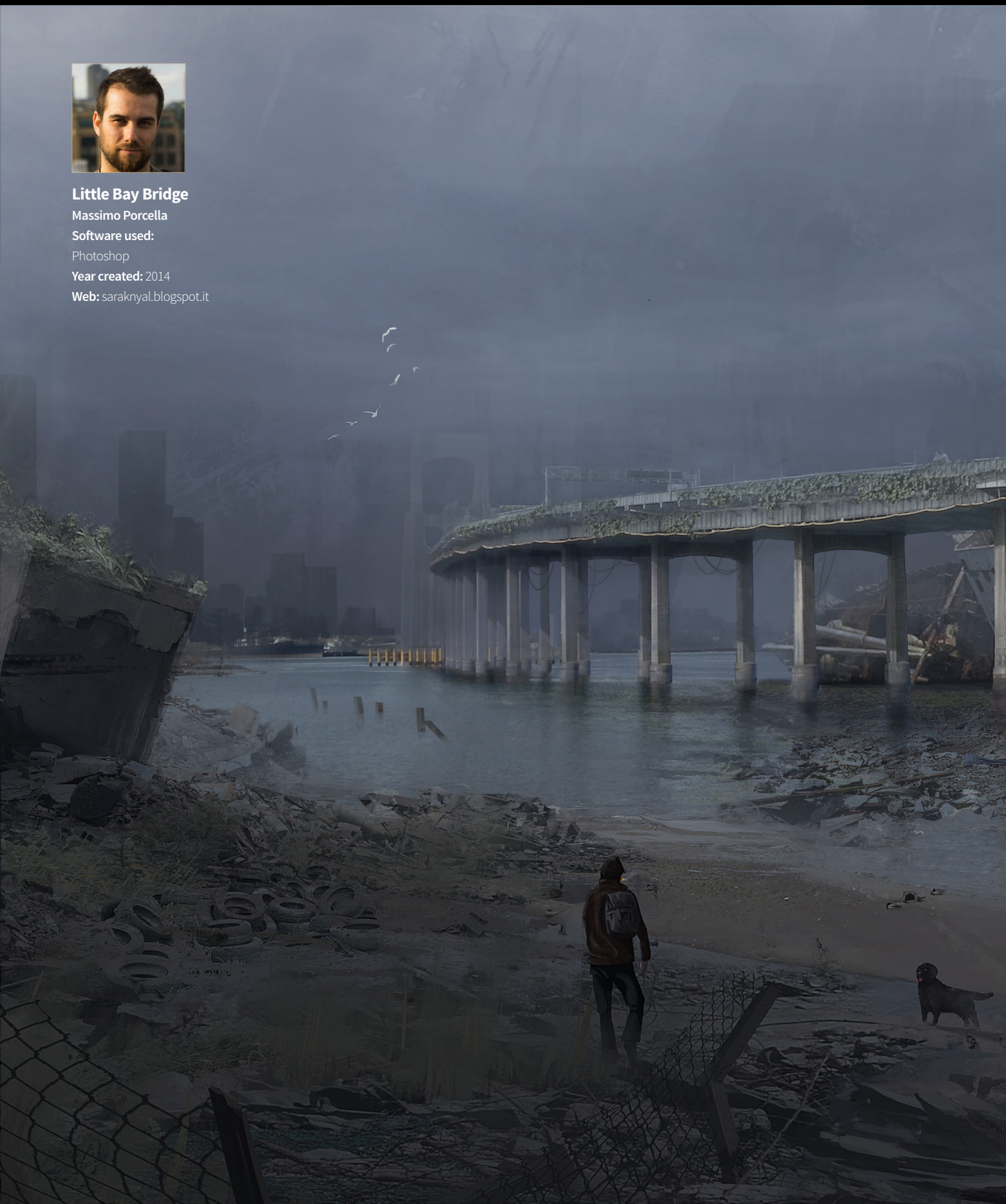**Little Bay Bridge**
Massimo Porcella
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2014
Web: saraknyal.blogspot.it

Goddess of Darkness

Omid Nekouhemat Tak

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: omidtak.cghub.com
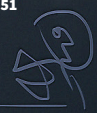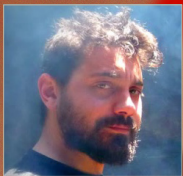
Freak Killer

J. Alexander

Software used:
Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: behance.net/JosebaAlexander

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Student Term 2 Project
by Lionel Lim

Student Term 2 Project
by Safdar Ali Mirza

The Artist

Richard Tilbury
richardtilburyart.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Originally trained as a fine art painter, Richard Tilbury now works as a freelance concept artist and illustrator and has contributed to many notable published works.

Get to grips with integrating photos

Richard Tilbury takes a look at the process behind producing a digital painting through step-by-step tutorials, which cover the principal techniques employed in Photoshop to create your own sci-fi themed image. Read on to discover how to utilize the Dual brush function in Photoshop and add details to your image using photos! ▶

Discover techniques to integrate photographs into your images...

If we refer to the original image from last week's tutorial, we can see a few key unusual aspects in the composition. Due to the inconsistent arrangement of volumes and shapes in the image, I have relied on atmospheric perspective and a repeated motif as the main vehicle for conveying depth.

Also, because the horizon line has been lowered, the ground plane is heavily foreshortened. In order to support this, it was important to add some visual clues in the scene – something that the pool of water did to some extent.

01 **Correcting the perspective:** This image shows the original foreground above and the revised version below. I add some water that runs towards the horizon, helping to both define the perspective of the ground plane and create some interest.

Because we perceive more detail when in close proximity to an object, then it follows we should apply this theory when painting. If the foreground is in extreme shadow or is blurred to create focal depth then you may make an exception, but as a rule it works quite well. One way to achieve this is by varying your brushes and using textured ones to generate more variety.

This can be done by customizing an existing brush from your library. Custom brushes can be made from scratch but you can often create a good result by manipulating the Brush Presets of default Photoshop brushes

02 **Dual custom brushes:** Here we can see a standard Hard Round brush in the upper right with the Opacity set to Pen Pressure (a setting preferable for most brushes). If you scroll down the list in your Brush panel to Dual Brush and activate this, you have access to the rest of your current library and can combine it with another brush.

The bottom left window shows the active Dual Brush function and the resultant effect on the right-hand side, which has now introduced a second brush. The type of texture you get depends on the secondary brush but you can also tweak the settings to vary the brush.

Once you are happy with your brush, don't forget to save it by clicking on the Create New Brush tab

01

02
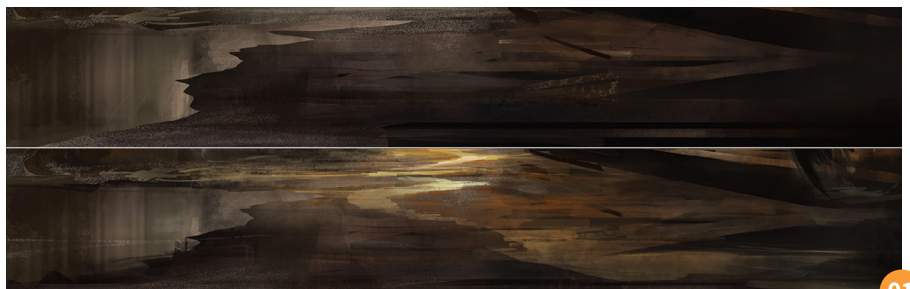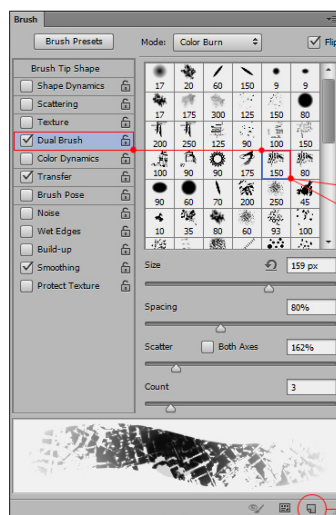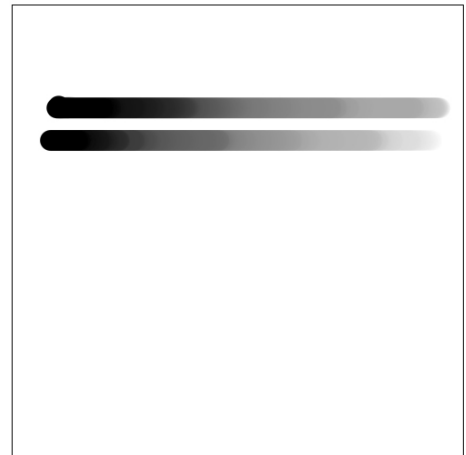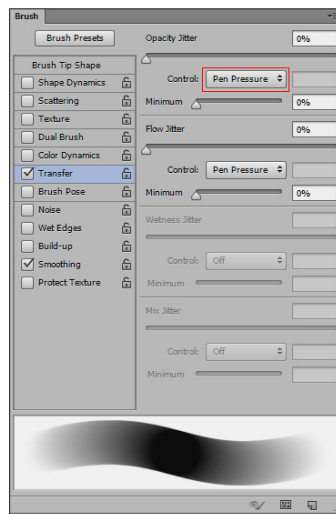
at the base of the panel. The new brush will now appear at the bottom of your library.

03 **Creating a new brush:** If you want to create a new brush you must first define a shape and then make a selection area around it. Then go to Edit > Define Brush Preset and give it a name. This will now appear at the b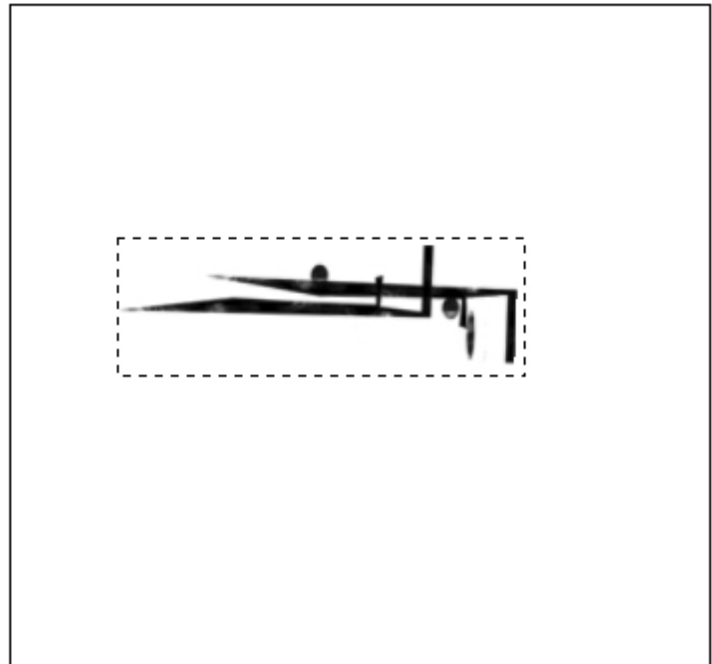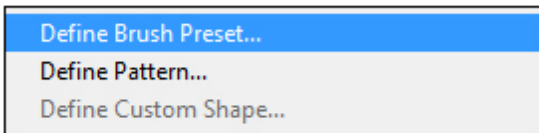ase of your library, though when you select the brush it will be far from correct and will require some tweaking within the Brush Presets.

04 **Altering brush settings:** Once you have opened the Brush Presets panel, start at the top and begin by altering the Spacing (left-hand image). This helps define your brush shape.

If you want to add variation throughout the stroke, flip the X and Y Jitter under the Shape Dynamics – you will also notice I link the size of the brush to Pen Pressure and set the Angle Jitter to Direction. This means that the stroke orientates with the direction of the brush (see middle panel).
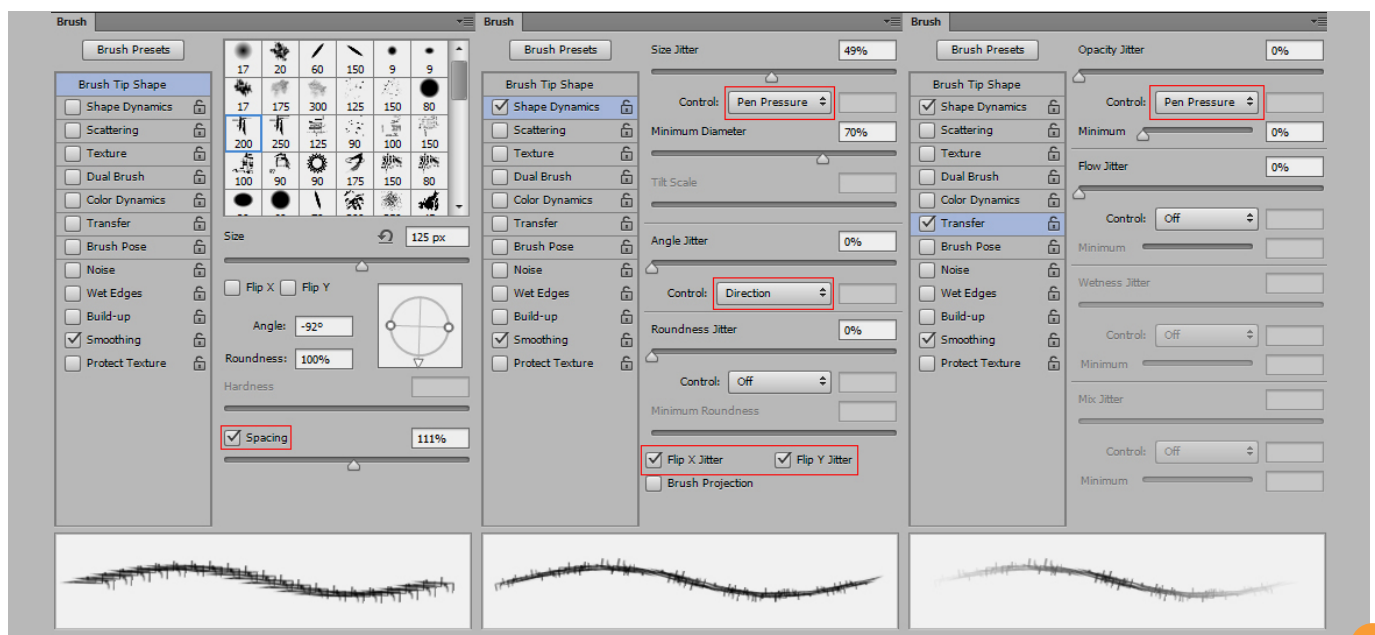
I finally set the Opacity to Pen Pressure under the Transfer tab (right panel). ▶

01 Comparing the original and revised perspective shots

02 Creating dual custom brushes in the brush settings

03 Defining the selection area when creating a new brush

**04** Changing the brush settings to create the right brush stroke

05 **The final brush:** Once the brush is saved out it resembles this image here, where less pressure results in a smaller and lighter tip.

06 **Focus and detail:** The color scheme and composition at this stage is well established, despite the absence of the characters which will eventually become the key focal points.

It may be worth mentioning that you should always work on the image as a whole and not get carried away with details. As part of painting a secondary composition I included some characters to get an idea about their placement, but if I hadn't explored this aspect then it would have been wise to include them during the blocking-in phase. From this initial sketch I realized that a foreground character was what I wanted with one or two set further back to help lead the viewer into the scene.

In this image, one thing I quite like is the cylindrical section in the left foreground, perhaps suggesting a fallen engine component, so I
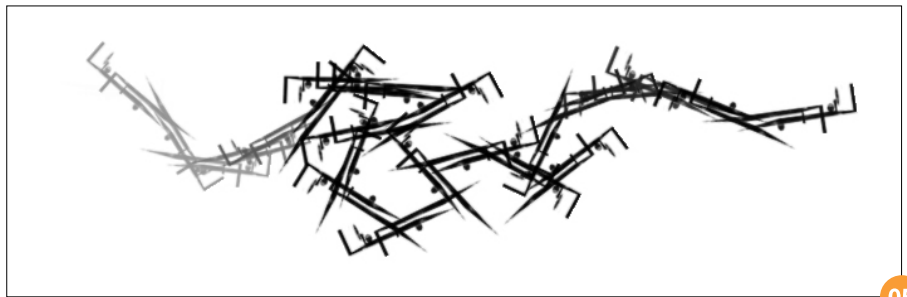
decide to include this along with a few duplicates on the main wreck. At the moment the scale looks a little inconsistent between the foreground one and those in the background but we can fix that later. You may notice the suggestion of detail in the shaded underside which comes courtesy of photo overlays; an effective technique for quickly adding realism.

07 **Using photos:** If we look at this image, the silhouette of the ship is rather vague with the upper section appearing to merge with the atmosphere, while the distant section looks clearer by contrast. We could simply sharpen the edge, but instead will use a photo to suggest a mechanical structure. You can either search

online or use a camera and photograph a subject with specifics in mind; it is up to you, but obviously there may be a limit to what you can find yourself.

I found this image of some abandoned machinery which looks like it was used in mining to carry materials along a series of conveyor belts.

08 **Scale:** One aspect to be aware of is scale; it is important that whatever you sample fits within the context. That's not to say that you need to find an image that perfectly matches the perspective and proximity of your image but if for example you are describing a distant building then a close up may prove
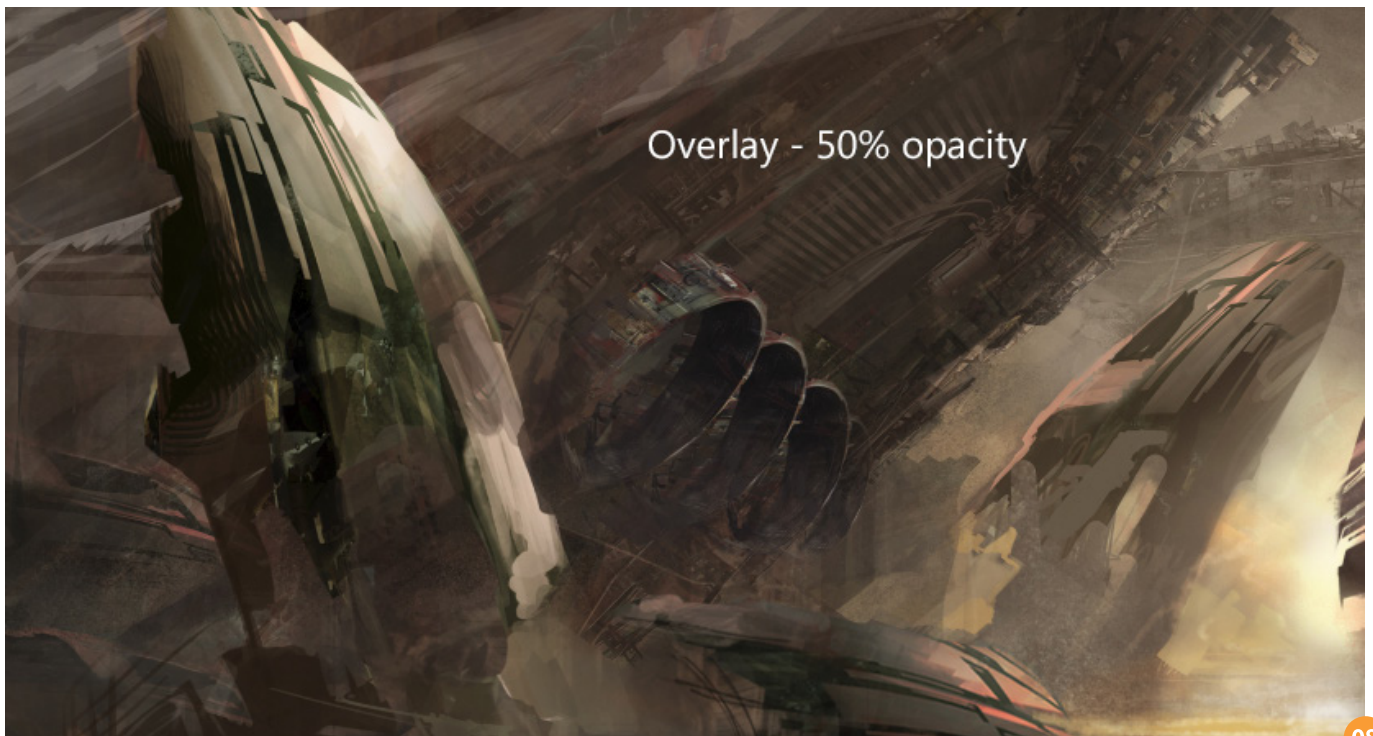
Section of photo copied and pasted into image and then repositioned.
Use the Eraser to edit the shape

07

Overlay - 50% opacity

08

"The degree and choice of the blending mode will depend on the context"

inconsistent and difficult to integrate. This is not an absolute rule but rather a guideline as indeed there are instances when this will work.

You can see here that the scale of machinery is far smaller than the spaceship but the level of detail within the selection area is consistent. There is a section of grass and sky included which obviously isn't ideal, but can remain depending on the

blending mode. At the moment it looks far from satisfactory but if we alter the blending mode and reduce the Opacity it looks entirely different. Part of the reason it works well is that the original photo is quite desaturated. This means that when you set it to Overlay it will adopt the color of the base image.

Generally you will need to make some color adjustments in order to ensure the photos blend in with your color scheme, but the degree and choice of the blending mode will depend on the context. If you wish to use Overlay, for example, ▶

05 The final brush effect

06 Working on the image as a whole and choosing a focal point to add detail

07 Using photos to add texture and definition to silhouettes

08 Getting the right scale is important –use adjustments to make any additions fit the image

Once copied & pasted the brightness is lowered and opacity reduced to 44%

09

Luminosity ⇕ Opacity: 43% ▾

Luminosity ⇕ Opacity: 70% ▾

Overlay ⇕ Opacity: 50% ▾

Normal ⇕ Opacity: 44% ▾

10

Sample colour & then paint additional detail

11
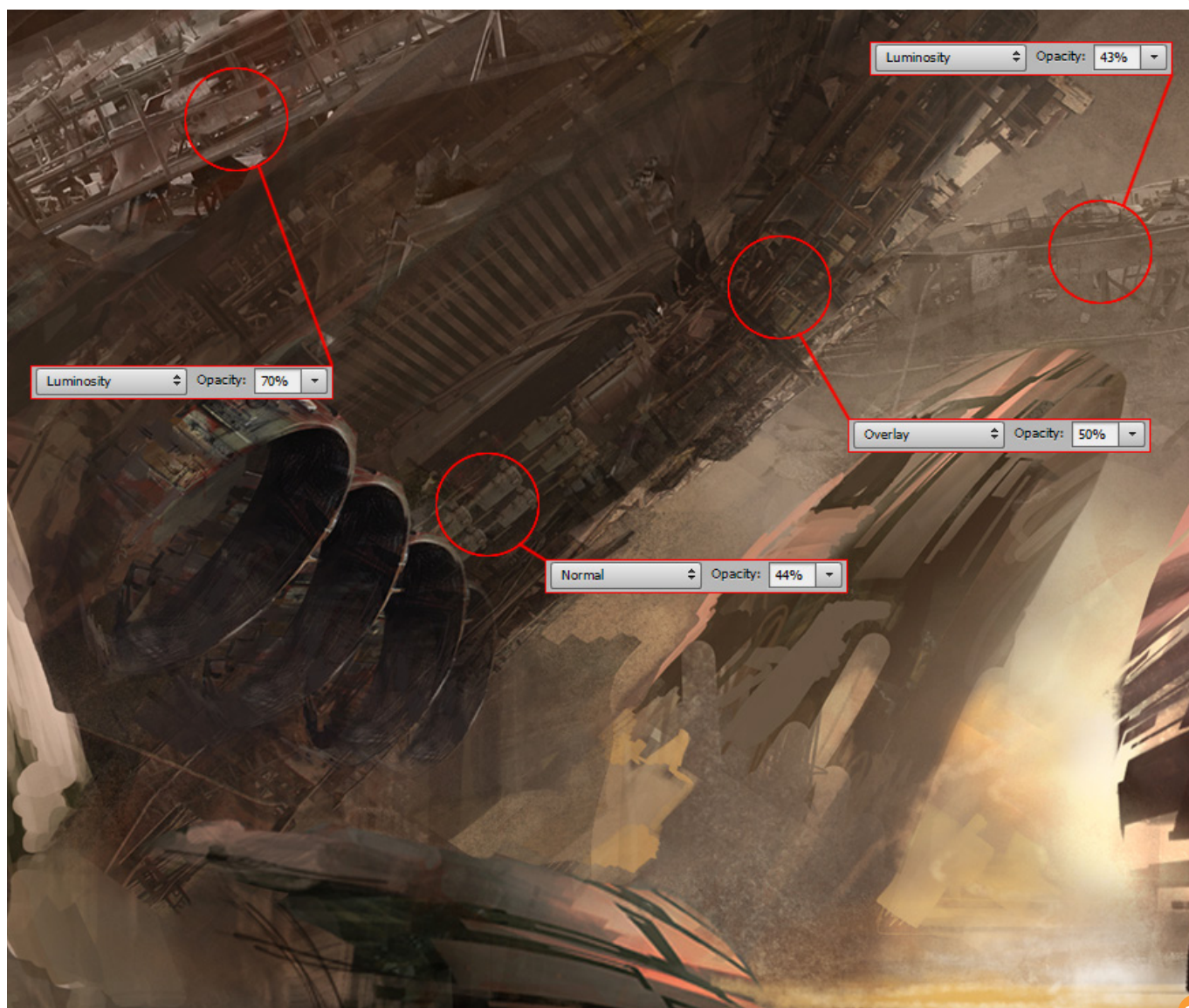
then you will probably need to desaturate the photo. The important issue is to maintain the tonal range and make sure that the contrast is similar. Sometimes you may prefer to keep the blending mode as Normal and use Image Adjustments to modify the color and contrast so they match.

09 **Integrating a photo:** This image is a good case in point; you'll see that the highlighted cylinder was extracted and the brightness lowered slightly. Once the Opacity was lowered the blending mode did not need to be altered as it worked quite well. This was due to the fact that the color scheme and contrast was sympathetic to begin with.

Apart from this reference the rest of the ship and areas of the background used the same photo of mining machinery.

10 **Photos in the image:** Here you can see the culmination of all these additions with their associated blending modes and opacity settings.

The far left region was set to Luminosity as this is a section at right angles to the underside and I therefore want it to be a little lighter. If it was set to Overlay it would have adopted the value of the ship layer and appear darker.

Always remember that the photo overlays should be used to reinforce your painting rather than dictate the content. Once the photo has been color-corrected then you can use your brush to blend it in, adding the mortar between the stones as it were. You can also use the Eyedropper to sample colors which can in turn be used to add additional detail.

11 **Comparing effects:** This image shows a section of color-corrected detail on the left, and color-corrected and painted detail (using the color apparent in the photo layer) on the right.

If your layer is not set to Normal mode you will need to do this on a separate layer, otherwise the color you are sampling will not be a true representation of what you are seeing. ●

09 This photo was well integrated into the scene using Opacity

10 The various additions to the image and the adjustments made to integrate them

11 Comparing the different stages of adding detail

The Artist

Richard Tilbury
richardtilburyart.com

RICHARD'S DEPTH & SPACE
CHAPTER 02 CAN BE SEEN IN ISSUE 097
2dartistmag.com

49 pages of tutorials inside!

Crafting sci-fi scenes

Geoffrey Ernault uses gradients and brushwork techniques to communicate visual direction

Top tips for creating narratives

Mike Azevedo explores lighting methods to build on characters and atmosphere

SKETCHING TO EXPLORE 3D FORMS

Kurt Papstein shares his sketchbook and how it helps form his 3D sculptures

Gabriel Romero
using simple brushes to hone your painting skills

Mastering
sci-fi concepts

Derek Stenning talks about the idea behind his EK series and his future freelance ventures

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• **Learn to paint with photo textures**
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The Artist

Donglu Yu
donglu-littlefish.blogspot.ca

Software Used:
Photoshop

Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. Donglu has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.

Learn to paint with photo textures

Senior Ubisoft concept artist, Donglu Yu gives us a step-by-step guide of the process involved in concepting a fantasy cliff-face dwelling. She gives us an in-depth insight into the research stage, through to applying photo textures to give a sense of realism to the final concept! ▶
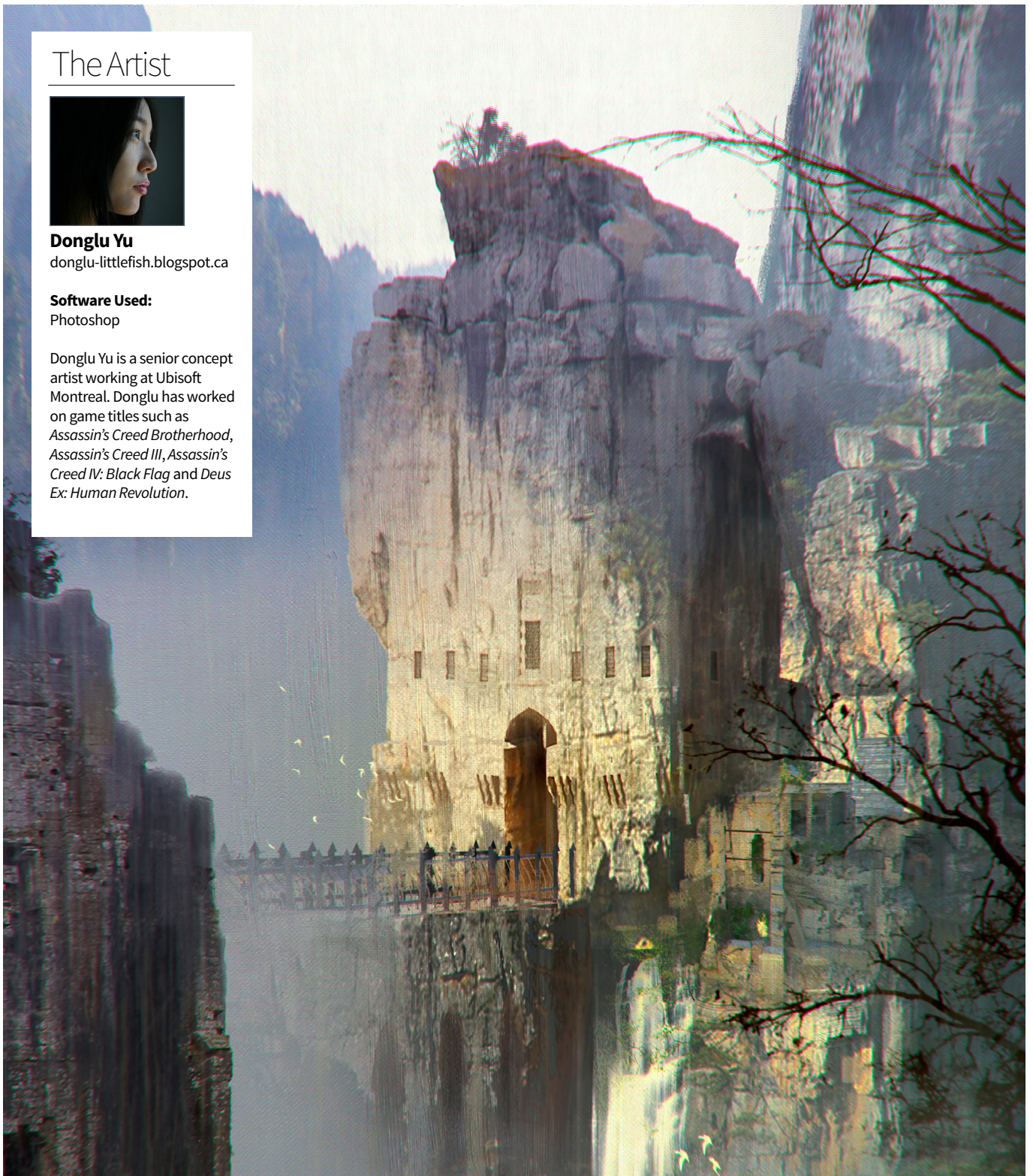
Donglu reveals how to use photo textures to add realism to your image...

With this fantasy painting tutorial, I will introduce you to my digital painting techniques, and explain how to find fresh design ideas for the given subject matter.

I am using solely Photoshop for the technical demonstration since this is the universal tool used in the professional entertainment industry. Since I have been in the video industry for almost 6 years already, I think it would be helpful to talk about the kind of interaction that you would have with different art directors in a production context too.

First, I will show you how I research my subject. The art directors would very likely challenge the concept artists' design ideas, so you need a solid research phase to ground your visuals. Then, I will do the first sketches with the pictures that I gathered. Those photo references are usually shown and approved by the art direction. Once we lock down an interesting design idea and an appealing composition, we can start to further define the black-and-white drawing.

In the last parts of the tutorial, I will attack the color aspects: how to find the palette and how to use photo textures to give realism to the final concept. Using photos is becoming an essential part of the concept creation in a production, because it gives a tremendous amount of detail for the modelers and the texture artists within a short period of time. If sometimes I want to stay away from photos, I do paint from scratch for my personal artworks. However, in reality, the industry nowadays insists on the use of photo textures.

> **"I strongly recommend you spend a significant amount of time, around one to two hours, looking up photos on Google images, websites such as Flickr, and/or different loyalty-free photo banks"**

01 **Finding the good references:** Finding good references doesn't only give you the chance to find interesting design ideas; it can also help the other artists in the art department to understand the thinking process behind your design ideas.

01

I strongly recommend you spend a significant amount of time, around one to two hours, looking up photos on Google images, websites such as Flickr, and/or different loyalty-free photo banks. I do build up my own reference library; it has become quite large with time. I classify my pictures into different categories such as architecture, mood, weather, forest, mountain, tunnel, cityscape etc. The proper organization lets me track down my needed references quickly and feed my brain with new visuals.

Here is a collage of photos that I found at **www. freetextures.3dtotal.com/index.php** mixed with my own photos. I call it a mood-board; there is one mood-board for almost all my professional works. I always have it open in my Photoshop on my second screen; I can constantly look at it to double check if what I am doing is still in the chosen direction. ▶

01 **The mood-board is a tool commonly used in the video game industry. It serves as a base for exploring a subject**

02 **First sketch down:** For the first sketch, I look for some high contrast value and an iconic composition. They should both reinforce the readability of the image. I always stay with a simple charcoal brush for those sketches; it fastens the process and it gives you some solid blocking shapes so the volumes are clear.

On top of finding interesting silhouettes for the mountains, I also start to search how to integrate architectural elements into the mountain rocks, so they can blend well together. I notice that the rocks have cubic volumes, so I try to repeat the same visual language to the dwellings: they are cubic, primitive, carved out of the mountain surface, and without having too many curves or fancy decorative quality.

Since it is a fantasy painting, I choose to set the mountain high in the clouds, so I have to paint in lots of fog at the bottom of the painting to achieve this effect.

03 **Looking for different composition:** I select a different composition to open up my options, picking a landscape canvas this time. I have a similar brainstorming process for this one: the overall direction stays the same; a huge cliff up in the sky, and an unknown civilization that has been settled here.

I try to imagine the lifestyle of this civilization to back up my visual choices. Their resources should be very limited; they can find wood, water and food in the jungle set on top of the mountain. There is no developed economy system going on, since they don't trade with other tribes yet. Their residences should only be equipped with the essential tools and furniture.

There is no entertainment industry in their society, but they are good dancers and singers; they would gather around a good bonfire and enjoy a nice evening with close friends. Even though these back stories can't be completely shown in the final image; this thinking process trains the logical mind behind the artistic output.

04 **New ideas on a third sketch:** Since I really appreciate this sketching process, I decide to make a third one. I do like the first sketch, but I feel that some of the architectural choices were not particularly solid. I'm trying to design an unknown civilization which has a logic urban planning.

I want to build a gate for the entrance for reinforcing the settlement's defense system. Behind the gate, we will first find the small villages for plantation, and then further in the

04

05

center of the map, we find the royal palace. Even though in my chosen camera angle, I can't see what is going on behind the gate, the thoughtful planning can help for future artworks. What if your first sketch sells the idea; and your art director wants you to prepare an art presentation which depicts all the key places of this civilization? Then things would be much easier for you – you already have a whole urban planning and social system set up in your mind.

05 **Finding the basic swatch:** At this point I think about the basic palette, time of day and the mood that I want to achieve with this painting. The easiest way to find the basic swatch is to sample the essential colors from my mood-board.

I take all my pictures on the mood-board and reduce its size significantly to about 300 pixels on the longest side. Then I go to Filter > Texture > Patchwork. I increase the square size to the maximum, a value of 10. I decrease the relief value to 0, so there will be no depth to the patchwork patterns. You will end up with an image with many little squares of the essential colors from the mood-board. This becomes the starting point of my coloring process.

I select the two dominant colors: desaturated blue and dark beige to be applied on the sky and the cliff bottom. I keep the swatch on a separate ▶
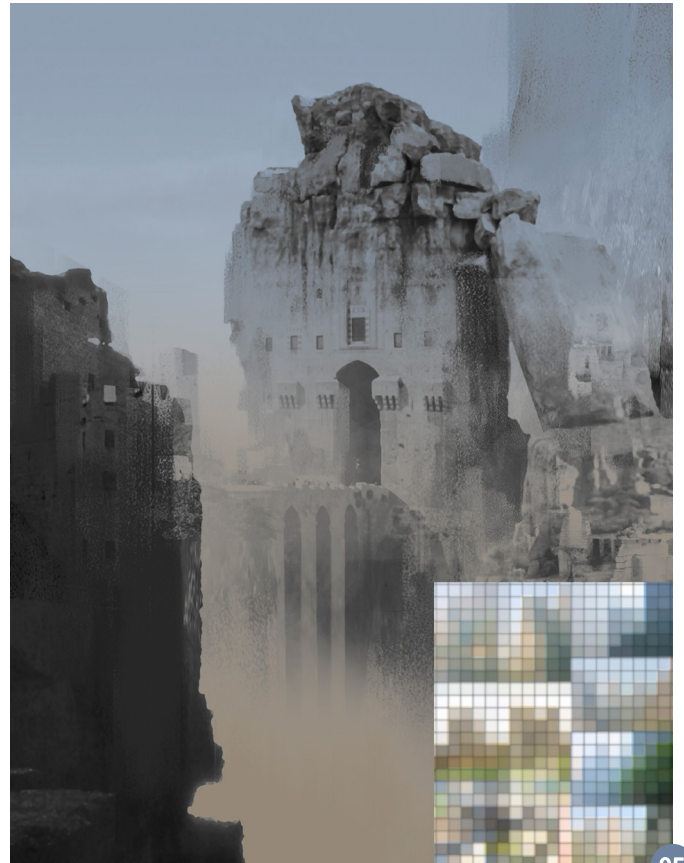
⚡ PRO TIP
....

Balance out the detail distribution

For my artworks, I always try to balance out the details distribution. Putting details everywhere will distract the viewer's attention from the main subject of the painting and make the image very hard to read.

For instance, if I would have to draw a scene with the crowd waving to the king, I will spend more time on polishing the king. I would definitely avoid drawing each individual in the crowd clearly. I would probably only suggest the crowd with loose brushstrokes, giving the right impression of their presence without necessarily painting them.

In short, I would rather leave one image less polished than evenly distribute details everywhere; the latter would certainly destroy the initial energy that had been captured in the original composition.

02 Large brushstrokes are applied to this early sketch to roughly shape out a high mountain in the clouds populated with architectural structures

03 It is always enjoyable to look for different composition options. Donglu decides to take on a landscape sketch this time

04 She further refines the architectural choices on this third sketch. It shows a logical meaning for the visual elements

05 She uses the mood-board photos to generate a basic swatch that can be applied to her chosen sketch

layer in my Photoshop file, so I can constantly refer to it for picking the different color variations.

06 **Perspective grid setup:** We are working on a very organic environment, compared to a cityscape or futuristic scene, which usually have lots of converging lines to indicate the perspective. This painting is composed by mainly rocks and other different natural elements. Without proper perspective guidelines, it will be very hard to integrate the dwelling properly to the scene.

I have created a universal perspective grid that I use for all my concepts; you can see this at the bottom-right of the image. It is basically a square canvas with the focal point in the middle and lines radiating from it. The dark-green horizontal line imitates the horizon. I take this grid, scale it up to be double or triple the size of my original canvas. Then I place the green horizontal line where the horizon is. I move the grid around until it aligns with the existing architectural elements on the painting. If this is a two-point perspective scenario, I duplicate the grid for indicating the other axes.

07 **Adding the textures:** This is the time that I make good use of my rock texture photo references. I place the textures carefully on the mountain surfaces and the dwellings. I usually decrease the contrast and the saturation of those textures so they can better fit together.

Because the references are often taken under different lighting conditions, in order to avoid their different values popping up in the texture collage, the best solution is to stay in the mid-tones. It is also important to erase certain parts of the textures for them to blend in with the base color sketch that we got previously.

If you observe well, the textures usually don't show up much in the shadows and the highlights. So they are the areas I look for to erase the textures with a natural-looking texture brush. Once this is done, I add some foggy mountains in the background to further enhance the feeling of depth within the image.

08 **Finding the light source:** Once the textures are done, we should move forward with the lighting; it is the key step to give ambiance and mood to the painting. Before putting it down on the canvas, let's think about the different possible lighting situations that we might give this scene: back-lighting, side-lighting, direct sunlight at noon or cloudy. In this case, I really want to show off the giant cliff dwelling, and I find that having the sunlight hitting from ▶

Since we are working with organic elements, the perspective grid can guide us throughout the whole painting process
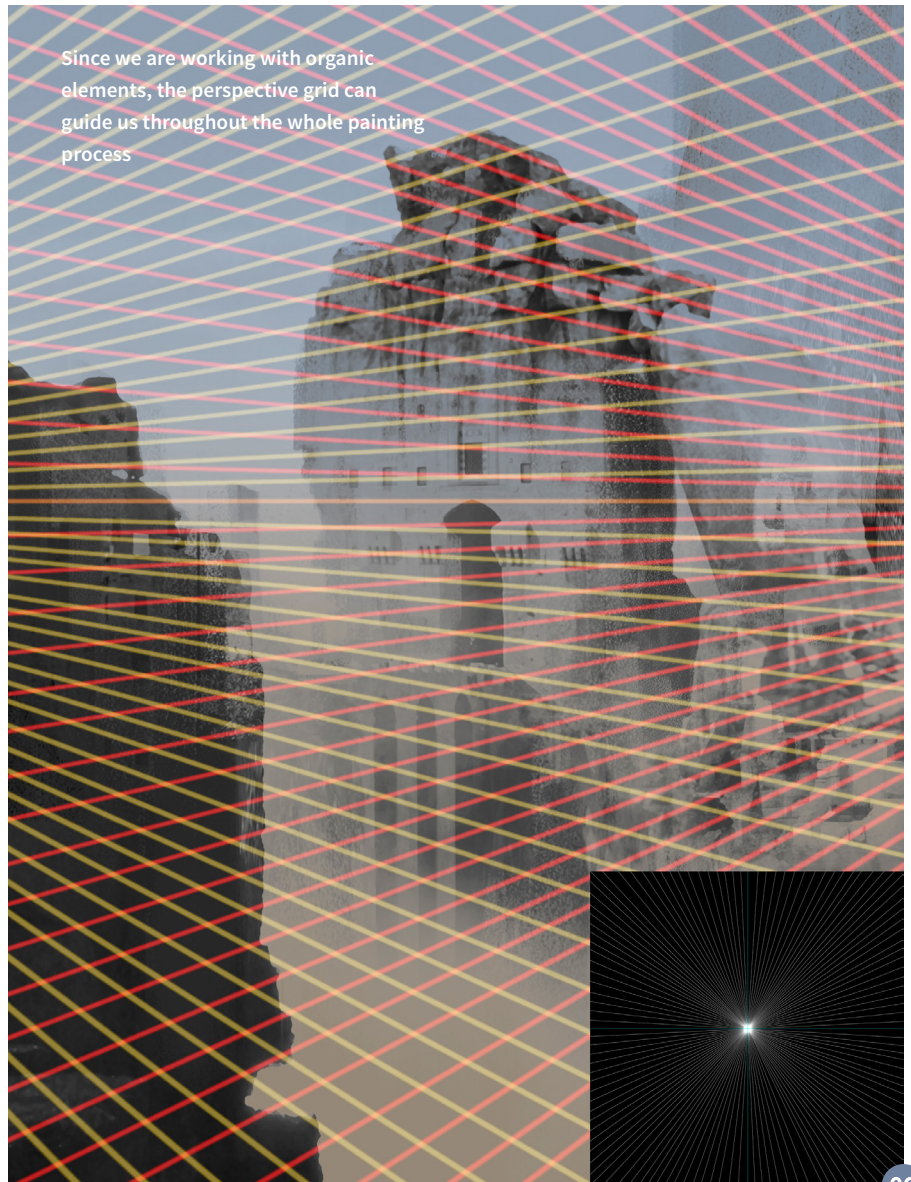
06

Integrating some photo rock textures on the mountains and part of the dwelling will give the image a realistic quality
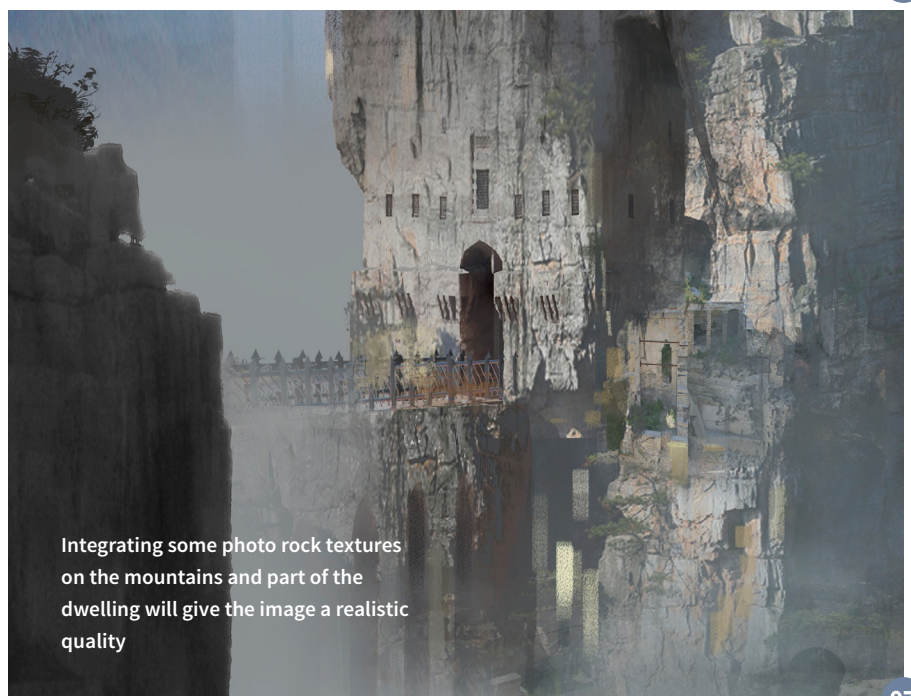
07

Adding the main light source hitting on the gate brings the viewer's attention to the focal point

09

10

the side right onto the gate is really interesting. Now the decision is made, I take a big round airbrush to draw a stroke from the top-left corner to the main gate. I put this layer on the screen and adjust the opacity to my personal preference. I duplicate this lighting layer and erase the top-left part to only accentuate the saturation and brightness on the gate.

I leave everything else in the fog so the sunny, well-lit part of the painting can be contrasted even further.

09 **Adding the extra elements:** As we are approaching the end, it is time to add extra visual elements to enrich our painting. To give a more fantasy quality to the image, I add some small waterfalls below the gate. I also add weathered rock textures on the foreground mountain; please refer to the step where I added the rock textures to the main cliff for more detailed instructions.

As you can see, some extra tree branches are necessary too, to better frame the canvas. The back mountains are also detailed with more photo textures. Adding some birds is another trick to show up the scale.

For all those extra elements, I keep them on separate layers, just in case the art director wants to move them around – it would be much easier to manage. I zoom out from the image often at this stage, so I always have an overview of the scene to avoid an over-dose of details that kills the nice feel that we have so far.

⚡ PRO TIP
....

Don't keep too many layers

I always try to keep less than 20 layers. It is much easier to manage and it forces you to think more before putting the brush strokes down. The situation might be handled differently by matte painters, because they have many render passes and post-effect compositing to deal with – I am talking more about the digital painters and the concept artists here.

In the past, I used to keep all my backup layers because I was afraid of some eventual changes, but I ended up spending more time switching back and forth between layers instead of practicing my painting skills. However I do keep the old version of my Photoshop file before any major layer merging, just in case some software technical glitches happen.

10 **Final polishing phase:** At the final phase, I use a small brush to blend all the colors together. I also apply a subtle color aberration to the final image so all the photo textures can be better integrated. For anyone who never used it before: Under Filter > Distort > Lens Correction, you have the option to add or to remove color aberration. I have seen that this effect has been abused on certain artworks. My personal opinion is to keep it subtle, since an overwhelming dose of the effect can take the attention away from your main subject matter.

Now that you have gone through a solid researching phase and a complete painting process of this fantasy image, it is time to present it to the art director with confidence.

I hope that with this tutorial you feel more comfortable with your digital painting skills

and the use of photo textures in your painting. Nowadays, it is an industry standard to integrate photos into digital painting. It is a fast-paced industry, and we are often asked to deliver an image within one or two days. Without the proper tools and working methods, it would be impossible to achieve the deadlines. ●

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09 Add some extra elements to further enhance the composition. Enhance some textures in order to give more intricacy to the painting

10 At this last stage of the painting process, take a fine texture brush to blend all the visual elements together
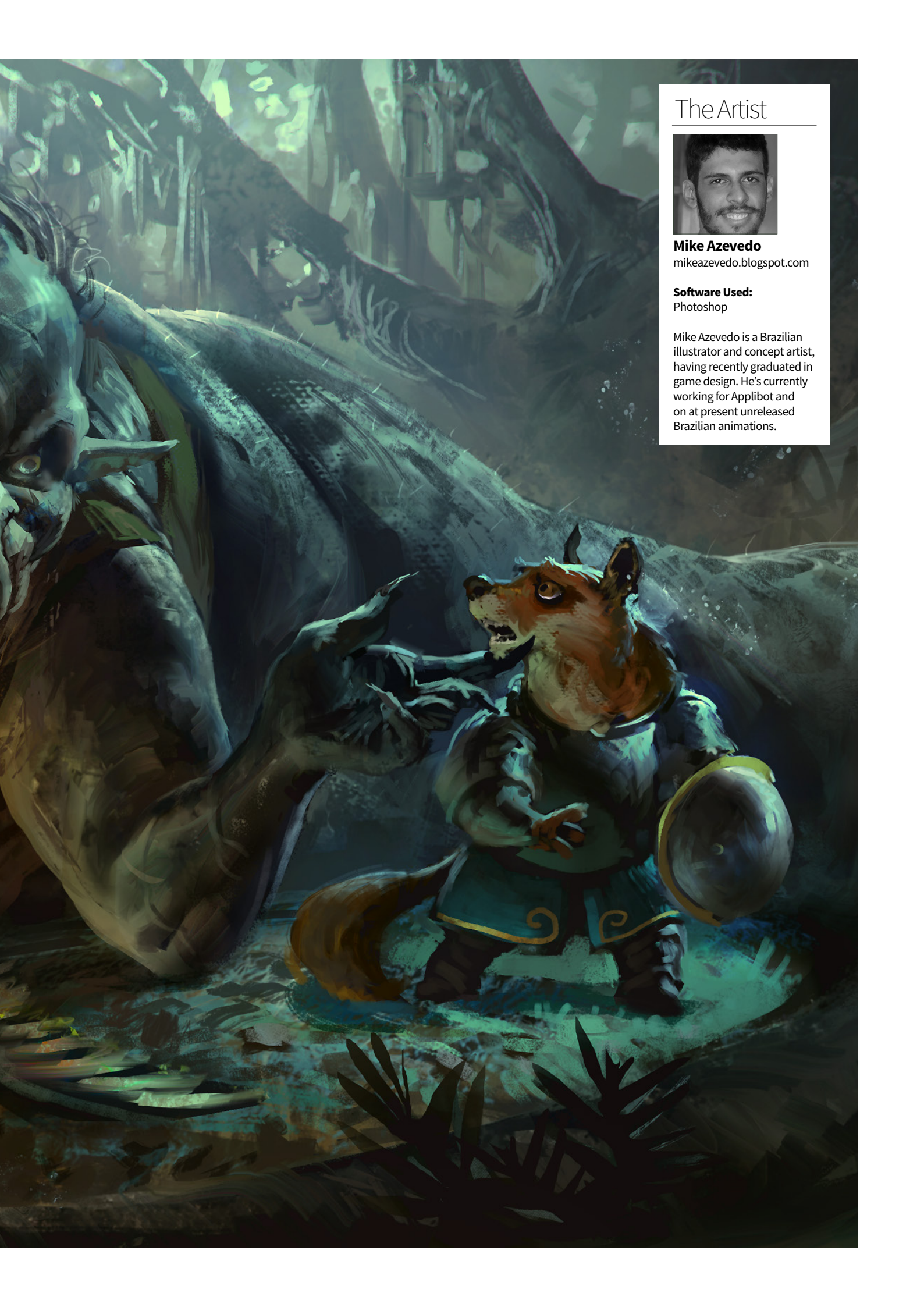
Top tips for creating narratives

Mike Azevedo demonstrates how to use lighting to create a narrative and captivate the viewer. In this tutorial, Mike guides you through useful techniques to build up characters and composition using light to evoke a fearful atmosphere ▶

The Artist

Mike Azevedo
mikeazevedo.blogspot.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Mike Azevedo is a Brazilian illustrator and concept artist, having recently graduated in game design. He's currently working for Applibot and on at present unreleased Brazilian animations.

Create dark and moody illustrations using lighting to tell a story...

This tutorial is about my process when creating a dark and moody illustration that immediately evokes the word 'fear'. I wanted the impact to be as clear as possible, while also trying to maintain the attention of the viewer in the story and composition.

For this illustration I decide to go with an evil mermaid witch finding a knight. Most of my ideas come from movies, games and books, such as *Legend* (1985), *Lord of the Rings* and the *Never-ending Story*. I look at screenshots before even touching the tablet to gather as many visual references as I can. In this case, I knew I wanted her to be big and threatening and reminiscent of a human. This was to bring even more of the 'fear' feeling to the image and yet allow the viewer to realize that the witch was once a lady and had a long story before this moment.

A big part of my process is about making the lighting tell the story for me, and building it as solidly as I can. This is easier if you break it into steps.

01 **Basic composition:** I start by blocking in big shapes of color and value. At this stage I'm using one layer for each shape. I try to pick very desaturated colors and close values here so I can build up my contrast later, because now the focus is on designing an interesting composition. I position a few lights at this stage too, just to give myself an idea of what comes next, like a place holder.

I choose a horizontal canvas to match my idea of a 'movie' style of scene.

I decide to make the witch very big and the character small to help the viewer understand his situation and the reason he is so scared of her. My idea is to create a spiral composition and bring the attention to both of their faces, as the interaction of the two characters is a key feature of this piece.

02 **Establishing the characters with light:** Right after I realize I'm pleased with the basic composition, I start working on defining the character that the witch is facing. My initial idea was a knight, so I start from there. He is the representation of 'good' in this image, so his design has to be the opposite of the witch.
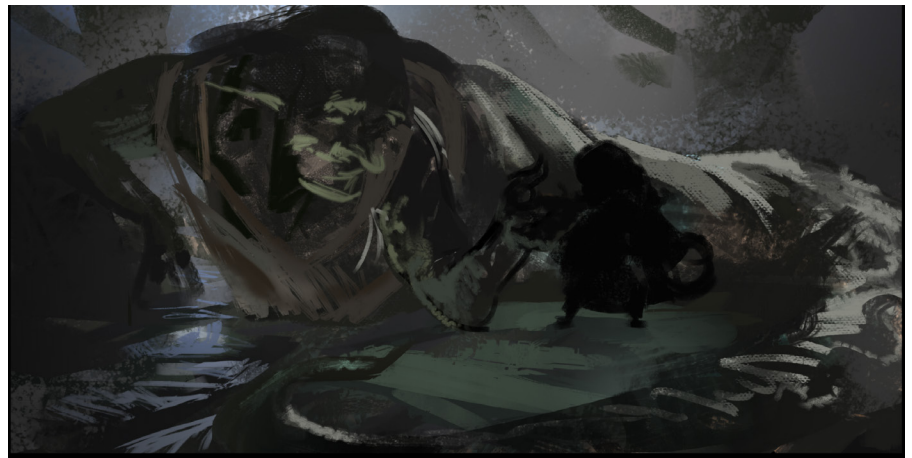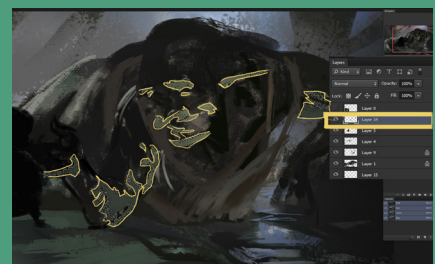

⚡ PRO TIP

Different layers for different light sources

I try to keep my light on separate layers so I have the power to change my mind later without compromising the forms below it. This organized way of doing things also helps me to use the Smudge tool on the light layer to blend it and so create a good reading form.

At this point you'll see that I'm also adding more light to the scene, slowly creating contrast. In my mind the witch is going to be partially in the shadow. This comes from the theory that the scariest thing to a human is the unknown, (used as a basis for many horror movies) so not showing the entire monster is better because you leave some parts to the viewer's imagination.

I decide to go with a cartoonier look to the knight and a more realistic look to the witch. This helps to make her grosser and him cuter, and adds variation to the piece.

03 **Deciding the expression and pose:**
Now I start defining the lights more and adding some more brightness in the background, right behind the witch. It's very easy to give that glowing effect using the Dodge tool set to Highlights and at 100% using a soft brush. This makes her silhouette more evident and creates some interesting negative spaces with her arm and the background.

I also start to work on the knight, defining him as a fox. I enjoy painting animals, so I figured why not do it! I also choose to depict a fox because I wanted an 'S' shape with the knight's pose to bring the interest back to the witch and vise versa, like an arrow. It's important to think not only about the anatomy but also abstract shapes – their expression and pose have to be easy to read. In my own work, I always try to simplify poses with basic lines, like the 'S'.

04 **Color and mood:** When I'm thinking about color, the basic things I try to remember is that the colors are relative to each other (warm and cool) and are the result of a math problem (color of light + color of the object).

What I mean is that I try to keep to basic areas of temperature. In this image, for example, I decide that the shadow areas are going to be warm and the light areas cool. I choose this way because I decide to go with a night scene and this light scenario usually creates cooler-looking light, and as a basic rule, warmer-looking shadows. I don't want to make the shadow area too hot though, because I still want all the colors to be reminiscent of the same mood.

Adding the color and mood also helps me to define the depth of this piece, much like the composition with shapes. Now comes the time for composition with temperatures. ▶

01 Creating a spiral composition to emphasize the interaction between the two characters

02 Defining the different lighting and drawing styles to help define the character's personalities

03 Defining shapes to add interest

04 Adding cool lights and warm shadows to create a cohesive night scene

05 **Lighting:** For this stage of the painting it's crucial to have a light area on a different layer. I'm basically adjusting and blending the light layer into the form with this light layer, so it's also possible to test how far you want to go with the brightness.

With the Dodge tool selected with the same configuration as before, I choose an area and make it pop more than other areas. I do that because it gives much more believability to the light; as it moves away from that area, the light will also fade. This fading effect is mostly achieved here by a soft brush or the Smudge tool, just pulling pixels to make a variation on the edges too.

Under the layer of the witch I use a Luminosity layer with a very dark value selected, then using a soft brush I start defining projected shadows on the ground.

06 **The witch – expression:** Right after I've toned down the light a little bit, I start working on her expression. The key here is to deform natural human anatomy while still maintaining a believable structure, so things like making the gum blue and the exaggerated cheekbone and forehead are good assets to make this character real.

It's important to keep in mind the different reactions to light from each material. The teeth and the eye, for example, each behave in a specific way when affected by light. I have a mirror next to my computer and I always use it to make expressions to draw. Working this way helps to give the witch the confident and 'ready-to-make-an-evil-laugh' look.

A good way of painting the imperfections of their face is to (with the light on a new layer) erase some areas and create little bumps, as is visible on her nose and forehead.

07 **The knight – expression:** The knight's expression needs to be the complete opposite of the witch's expression, so the viewer can understand his fear – which is the main goal of my piece. It's important to keep your ideas true from the beginning, and to help myself, I usually write down some of them on paper to remind myself where I'm going with the final piece.

I use references with a mirror to help me with his expression, and give him some human characteristics so the audience can empathize with him.

It's important to make his eyes big, because even though he is not very big on the composition, he needs to have a clear expression. He has to look paralyzed and in huge danger – the pose also helps to tell the story. Here, the knight has just turned to see what is moving, when the witch touches his face. This is the exact moment before the action happens – the classic Frazetta's rule.

08 **Refining the light:** Now, with all the big shapes defined, it's time to work on making the light convincing and unified. This has

a lot to do with the reflected light in this piece. I want the water to make some reflections on the face of the witch, under-lighting her face and so creating a more threatening impression.

I use the Smudge tool and a soft brush to create the water effect – the key is making the shapes look like waves. It's important to have warm shadow and cold light areas, to match the temperature of the whole painting.

There are some layer modes that could help when trying to convey mood: Lighten, Screen and Lighter Color are my favorites. I use it here with a light-blue on the silhouette of the witch to make it seem more affected by the environment around it.

09 **Story elements and details:** I mentioned before that I want to add story elements to this piece – now it's the time to do it. I use different layers to add each piece, so I can change it later if I need to. I add a necklace to the witch, possibly hiding a picture of a long lost husband, to create more of a back-story to her. This type of thing adds a lot to the piece.

I also add some vegetation to break the space in some areas and create more fog between her and the background.

I define the hands at this stage too, using my own hand as reference to get the pose correct.

As for the fox, I use some blue Color Dodge layers to bring more focus to him using a stronger light, as if he is standing right on a spotlight. I like thinking about theatrical light a lot.

10 **Final adjustments:** This is the final stage – but that doesn't mean I can't change a few things. If I see something wrong, I have to change it. A good example of that is the fish tail of the witch. ●

05 Creating lighting contrast using the Dodge tool and a Luminosity layer

06 Refining the witch's expression, and the light and textures on her skin

07 Creating tension and fear in the piece through the fox knight's expression

08 Harmonizing the light in the scene by adding reflections from the water

09 Adding story-telling elements, such as the necklace and fog

**10** Last minute adjustments to the scene

⚡ PRO TIP

Efficient fog

When you're doing a dark, moody piece, it's a great opportunity to use fog to separate the space and create depth. Create a layer between the background and the character and use a large brush that fits the smoke texture. Then with the eraser and a soft brush selected, erase the borders of the fog and blend it irregularly with the background.
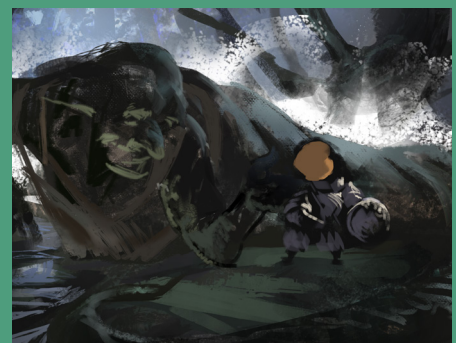
The Artist

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Crafting sci-fi scenes

The entertainment industry relies on being able to create powerful narratives and evoke emotions, beginning with the conceptual art! It's important to understand the process and techniques to nail it. In the following tutorial, Geoffrey Ernault demonstrates how to communicate a visual direction or style for a scene and create an overall feeling through the use of gradients and brushwork techniques

The Artist

Geoffrey Ernault
geoffreyernault.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Geoffrey Ernault is working as a freelance concept artist in games and movies. He is currently working on his portfolio in order to move abroad to work for an awesome company!

## Discover how and where to place objects to inspire a sense of movement...

In this tutorial, I'll be showing you the process of creating the image *The Scorched Earth Strategy* from scratch in Photoshop.

We'll see how to communicate a visual direction or style for the scene and create an overall feel from pictures, gradients and brushwork techniques from a short brief. Then we'll discuss how to work on shapes and get a basic composition, how and where to add objects that inspire a sense of movement and how to work with color and light.

Some of the techniques we'll see here are also very useful when coming up with your own ideas and compositions when you have no story or brief to work with, as they allow you to generate new ideas.

After that, we'll also see how to paint a sky and landscape to make them look interesting, and how to add effects to your landscape that link with your story or brief.

Once we have the main scene, we'll then add characters and spaceships (yes, spaceships!) into the environment, learn how to render them, and add some more effects around the overall image to finish off. The brushes I refer to in some parts of this tutorial are all from a
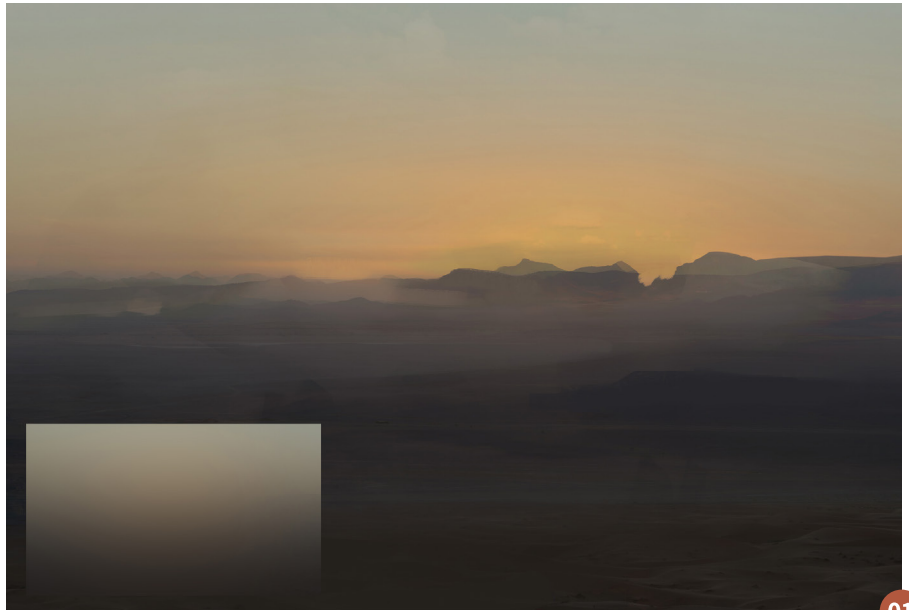
brush pack I created specially to share with you, containing brushes I've collected and used now for years.

01 **Working with chaos and gradients:** This is probably one of the most fun and frustrating steps of all! It's very fun due to the fact you're getting to do some exploration, but the annoying part is that, just like any exploration, sometimes you search for hours without finding a single thing.

The first thing I do is lay down a gradient that reflects my initial color choices. I have a bunch

of gradients that I created last year from different photos (dusk, daylight, night, snow, desert, fog etc). You can just create these yourself using the Gradient tool, and color pick pictures you like.

After that, I simply doodle around with random brush strokes and pictures, until I have something interesting to start working with.

02 **Adapting the shapes:** Once you start seeing something interesting, and can start imagining what it could look like finished, start getting some more pronounced shapes in your scene to add a bit more interest. The goal

here is to get rid of the chaos and get a good base to work on. Don't go into details at this stage, you really want to get the whole image working before rendering anything.

At this stage I advise working as zoomed out as possible, with the biggest brush size possible to not lose time. We're already starting to lay a bunch of information here: the colors, the type of lighting we'll have (with the orange hints on the right side) and the type of shapes (main mountains, etc).

03 **Adding a foreground (depth):** Now that we have something to work with, the next goal is to add some depth and work on the composition.

On this image, the best way for me to do that is to add a foreground in order to emphasize the distance between the background and the

camera, and also add some storytelling with the character silhouettes.

This is a bit cliché and very '2004 concept-looking', but adding characters in the bottom-left/right of the image is something that tends to do the trick easily. I decide to also add a tree to show there is vegetation in the scene.

A chaotic texture stretched and set on Overlay creates that sort of yellowish abstract mass, which made me want to add some ground burning in the middle of the image later on.

04 **Using dynamic curves and lines:** At this stage, I try to draw the lines and shapes of the composition to be sure everything has a nice flow to it and moves in the same direction. This helps me when I rework, relocate or adjust shapes later on. I also check the usual rule of thirds, golden ratio, etc, at the same time. ▶

01 The gradient at the bottom-left, and the result behind. The main goal is to mix shapes and colors to get something that gets your imagination going

02 Adapting the shapes from the previous chaos, in order to get something more consistent and defined

03 Adding a strong foreground with characters usually helps add depth and tells a story

04 Drawing curves going in the same direction help create a flow in the image and helps see where to modify and place shapes later on

05
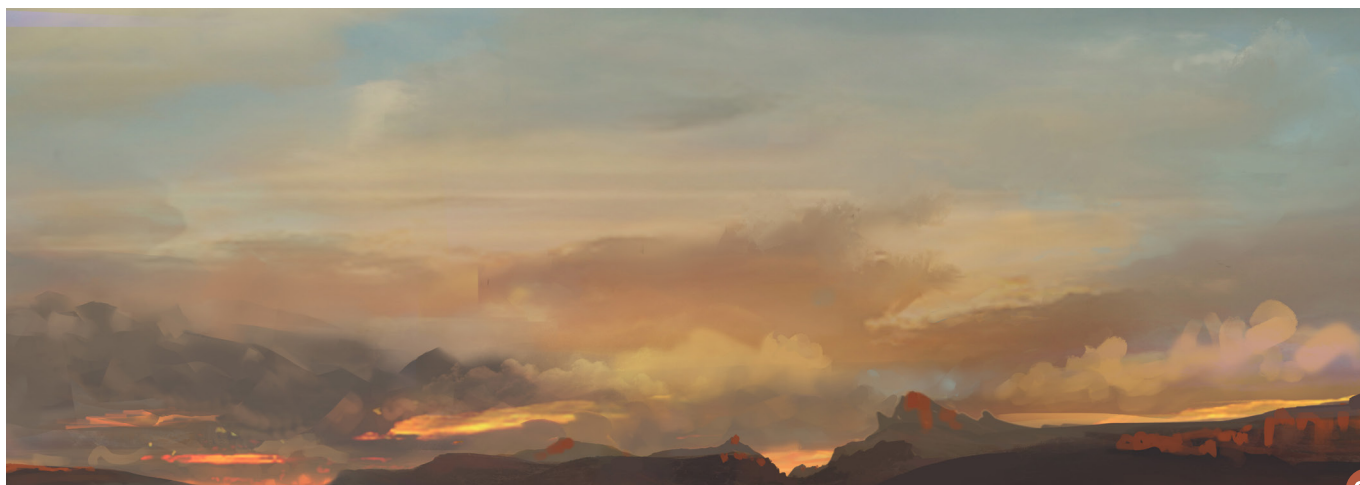
06

> ## "I also like to add a little unexpected color to add more richness"

05 **Placing the sky and ships:** Now that I'm kind of happy with the overall flow and composition, I try adding the other objects to populate the scene – in this case, the spaceships burning the ground. I usually have these on a separate layer and play with them a lot during the whole image process, to see if they fit better in other places. I also do a lot of horizontal flips, to be sure that the composition also works well when flipped.

I also start placing big color spots and ref pictures in the sky, to be sure I can put down something that works overall. I use a bunch of sky pictures

from either **cgtextures.com** or **3dtotal.com**, and then paint on top to get the effect I want.

06 **Starting to render the sky:** The great thing about working this way is that now I'm happy with the general colors and main shapes of the sky, I can just color pick where I want and render from there.

I try to use a mix of different brushes, with the Mixer brush tool, in order to get something that looks painterly and natural. That way, I kind of just stretch the colors and shapes that are already placed, but add more texture and variety in them. At this stage, I use a lot of references to understand how dusk clouds are, and I try to be as natural as possible with my brush strokes.

07

08

Over-thinking them will create something unrealistic, and usually you end up with generic round blobs. Use different forms of brushes to help you get an original and unexpected result – this is often better than just using a basic Cloud brush.

07 **Rendering the ground:** This next step is similar to the previous step, except this time the goal is to get some hard edges and use haze/atmospheric perspective to separate each different layer of the mountains. I usually just do that with the Lasso tool and a big soft brush. With that way of working, you don't need to think much about the colors and can just color pick on your image around where you're working, since the palette is already established.

In this process however, I also like to add a little unexpected color to add more richness. In some parts, I color pick where I want to paint and add a bit more blue or green to vary the palette. Also,

I add more orange highlights at the tip of some of the mountains to reinforce the direction of the sun and add more color interest. I also sketch a tree in the bottom-left corner to focus the viewer's eyes on the foreground.

08 **Adding the fire and smoke:** Once I'm happy with the general way the ground looks, I start to add some effects. The fire plays a big role in this image, so I had to be sure to place it early enough and see what worked with it. I simply used a normal round brush and used a bright red/orange on a Color Dodge layer mode.

The secret here is to add another Color Dodge layer on top with a Soft brush, to get that glowing effect. Don't overdo this though, as you don't want it to look too bright and fake.

The smoke is simply painted on top with a soft round brush, and a light gray.

05 Placing a couple of sky references and the spaceship helps to finalize the important aspects of the image before starting to render

06 Adding more shapes and volume to the clouds, and placing the main light accents

07 When working on the landscape, try to separate everything to get depth and be sure to have strong shapes.

08 With a couple of layers set on either Screen, Linear add, or Color Dodge, and using hues of red and orange, you usually get some nice light/fire effects

09 **Painting the spaceship:** Surprisingly, the spaceship is one of the easiest things to paint, even though I thought it would be the hardest. The trick here is to first make sure the main silhouette has the right perspective. To do that, I use a three-point perspective grid which I keep on a separate layer throughout the whole process (I tend to use perspective guides throughout the whole image process).

Once I'm happy with the main silhouette and placement, I start by working on the main lighting and making sure where the main volumes are. No point in adding detail if you're not sure if something is round or flat.

Then, I usually use either custom shapes, or more easily engine pictures, which I set on a separate layer on Pin light mode. That way, I only keep the shadows of the reference picture, which create interesting shapes on the ship for me to work on. I then rework these so they fit the design I'm looking for.

Once I'm done with the shapes, I add a bit of texture with custom brushes here and there to make it feel a bit older, with worn surfaces. Even the textures are hand-painted on a normal layer, to be sure that the whole thing is coherent.

10 **Light accents and landscape details:** After this is done, I notice that the landscape is missing interesting highlights, so I simply push the orange highlights on the mountains a bit more to attract the eye back to the landscape.

As you can see in this enhanced image, the whole thing is painted with mostly a soft round brush, but painting a scene from far away saves you time and allows you to focus on the essential elements of your image. Even if the enhanced version looks sketchy, the overall image works and is coherent. This also teaches you to focus on the main characteristics of objects and how to quickly express them in your images.

11 **Rework on the fire and dust:** I now go back to the main fire effects as I think they look too simple.

I add more layers of detail on the fire, following the same pattern as before (a couple of Color Dodge layers, with a simple round brush and bright orange colors). I use the Line tool to create the laser coming out of the spaceship on a Screen layer, that I later duplicate and blur on a Color Dodge layer, to get the glowing effect. I create the clouds with a custom brush set on Screen mode, and then erase areas that are far from the main
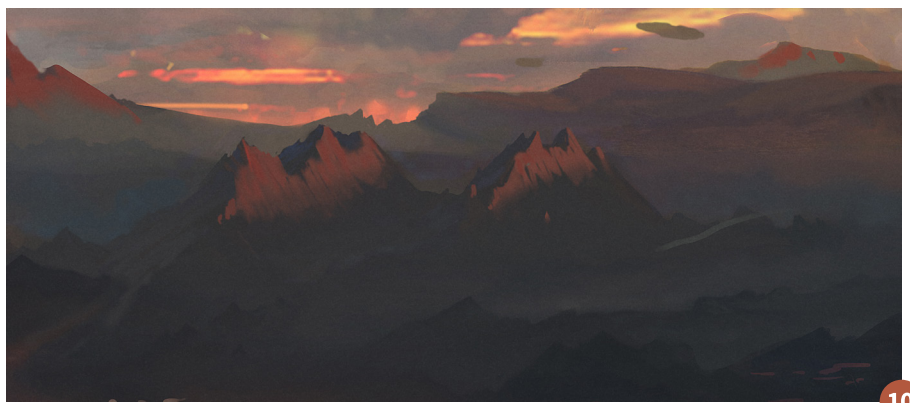
source (the beam and the fire). Once again, when it's zoomed in, we can see that this might seem sketchy, but when zoomed out it works with the overall image.

I make the burning laser track on the ground using an additional Color Dodge layer with a Cloud brush. You can also use a round brush with a bit of scattering.

12 **Trees, and more trees:** For the trees, I rely mostly on custom brushes. I use custom brushes for the main tree shapes and leaves, and then a simple round brush to render everything else. The trees around the fire in the distance are done with the Grassy brush in the brush pack. A couple of different layers going from the base color to orange do the trick.

For the trees in the foreground left, I use the pine forest brush. I first create branches, which I then paint on top of to correct the volume and lighting, and then use a few abstract leaf brushes on top.

The same thing is done on the tree on the foreground right – I first paint the branches, then select it and paint the lighting on top, and finally add the leaves. The dramatic lighting on the foreground trees help to bring the eye to the foreground and set it on the characters.

13 **Characters and foreground:** As this image is really about the burning landscape and the ships, I try to keep the characters simple. I just work on the overall shapes I had created from the silhouettes I painted earlier. The key thing here is to try and give them a pose that tells a story.

The character on the right is probably a bit too generic and boring, but his equipment and clothing balances that. On the other side, the one on the right is more simple, but the way he looks at the environment and lifts his hand, as if he was ordering the ships to burn everything, tells a story.

I usually try to start off a silhouette and use the light sources around to get some interesting highlights that give just enough information about the characters, without going too much into detail. I also add mushrooms and more grass on the ground, on which I add some highlights in order to further separate the foreground from the rest of the scene.

14 **The bokeh effect:** This one is pretty easy. When I'm done with an image, I usually like adding a bokeh effect for even more depth effect. For this, I use the alien skin bokeh plug-in.

You can also achieve this by going into Filters > Blur > Tilt shift. This will allow you to add depth blur, as well as add a bokeh effect (which is basically adding the shape of the fictional camera lens to your highlights).

15 **Final corrections and filters:** Finally, I apply a round of corrections and filters to get all the values, colors and final overall textures down. Usually I use a color correction layer first, where I add a bit of color in the shadows (usually green, I love green shadows – no idea why!) then play with the values using a Curves layer. I try to get rid of any pure black or pure white colors that may be in the image.

I also use a Lighten layer with very dark-blue, red or green, to get rid of the final pure black.

After this, I simply add a Smart Sharpen filter in order to tighten the brush stroke edges and make everything a bit easier to read.

And, last but not least, I add a Noise filter to add a little texture over everything and give it a more movie-like aspect. ●
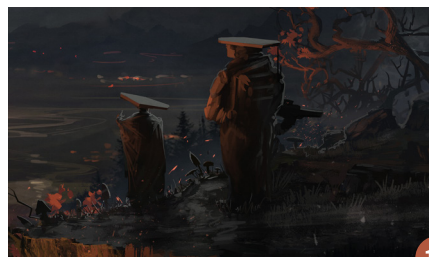
09 On the bottom-left, the ship silhouette. Next to it, the final ship

10 On this zoomed in image, we can see that you don't need to be pixel perfect. The most important thing is that the overall image is working

11 The reworked fire with more smoke cloud effects around it

12 The different trees in the image

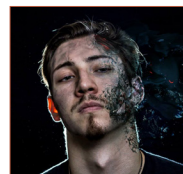**13** Mushrooms, characters and grass!

14 On top, the image without bokeh. At the bottom, the image with bokeh

15 The different filters applied

The Artist

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Discover the art of scale and perspective

Freelance concept artist Juan Pablo Roldan reveals the processes and techniques involved in creating his image, *EL ARCA*. In this comprehensive making of, Juan covers each step, from first concept, through painting, lighting and composition, to adding those all-important final touches in post-production ▶
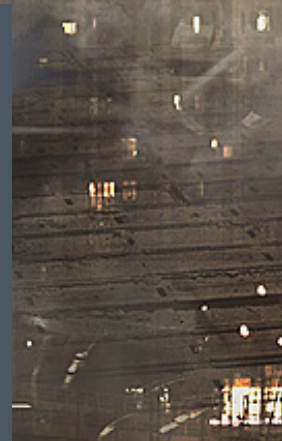
The Artist

JP Roldan
juanparoldan.blogspot.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Juan Pablo Roldan originally
worked as an art director in
an advertising agency, but
decided to switch to being
a freelance concept artist.
This allows him to imagine
anything he wants and have
fun designing characters and
environment concepts for
video games, short films and
graphic novels.

Juan Pablo Roldan shares the workflow and techniques behind *EL ARCA...*

This concept is inspired by the ark concept, translated into a dystopian future. I wanted to recreate a colossal ship that allowed hundreds of thousands of living beings to escape from the chaos by transporting them to a distant safe location. In this making of I want to share with you the development of the ark, going through the entire process step by step and following the techniques that I usually use when creating such an image.

Before starting any concept piece, I always try to imagine and feel the world that I want to create. I think about the historical context, the main character and the mood I desire to transmit. In order to get that sort of information, I usually do deep research into historical events in order to obtain strong arguments that will give my ideas a solid form.

Generally, I have fun exploring new brushes, textures, shapes and strokes; blending them to create chaos. Then I wisely control that mess and begin to head towards the direction that I chose previously. This way I begin to generate interesting reactions in the image, which in turn give me more ideas and permit me to find unexpected shapes that I will refine later on.
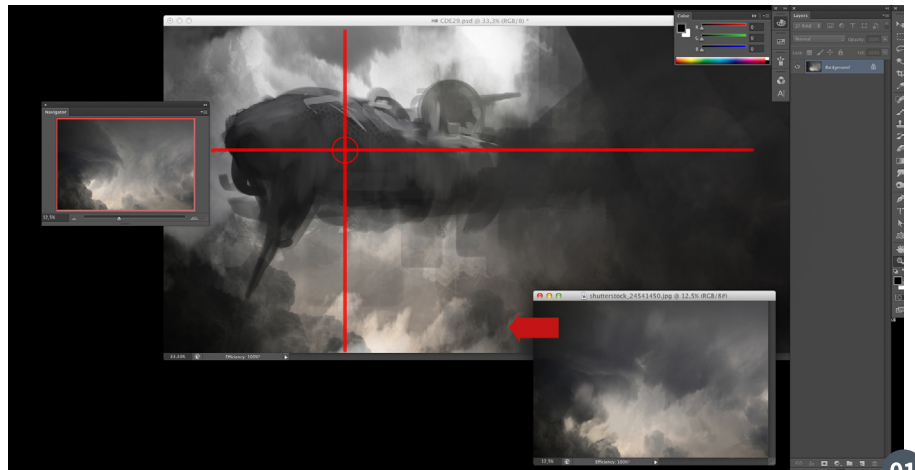
"It is important to work using visual references, especially when we are working on vehicles or robots"

A crucial thing that I always keep in mind about the chaos is that I do see what I really want to see, and I try to follow a logical path through to the main idea.

01 **Background and silhouette exploration:** In the first step, I established the mood of the image, the initial hue and the focal point. For this piece, I used some brushes that gave me new shapes and then I blended them with some photo textures that I had already carefully chosen.

After having the first background sketch down, I began to define the main character´s silhouette. At that point, I was just looking to find the right volume, shape and perspective of the ship – I am not focused on giving detail to it yet.

02 **References and perspective:** One of the most important artists that inspire my work is the master John Harris. What really inspires me is not the technique he employs, but the sensations and feelings that he transmits in each piece. I love the vertigo feeling he transmits in his pieces, especially in the gigantic vehicles.

So, for this project, I started looking for visual references to build my own gallery. I looked for them at www.cgtextures.com. It is important to work using visual references, especially when we are working on vehicles or robots.
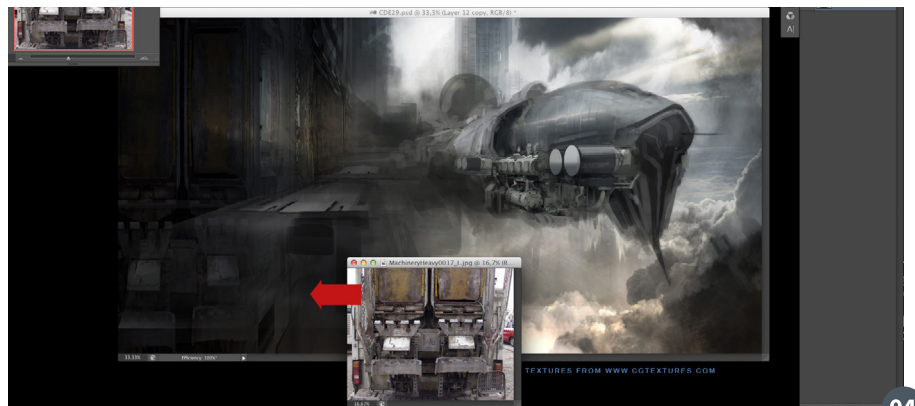

REFERENCES FROM WWW.CGTEXTURES.COM

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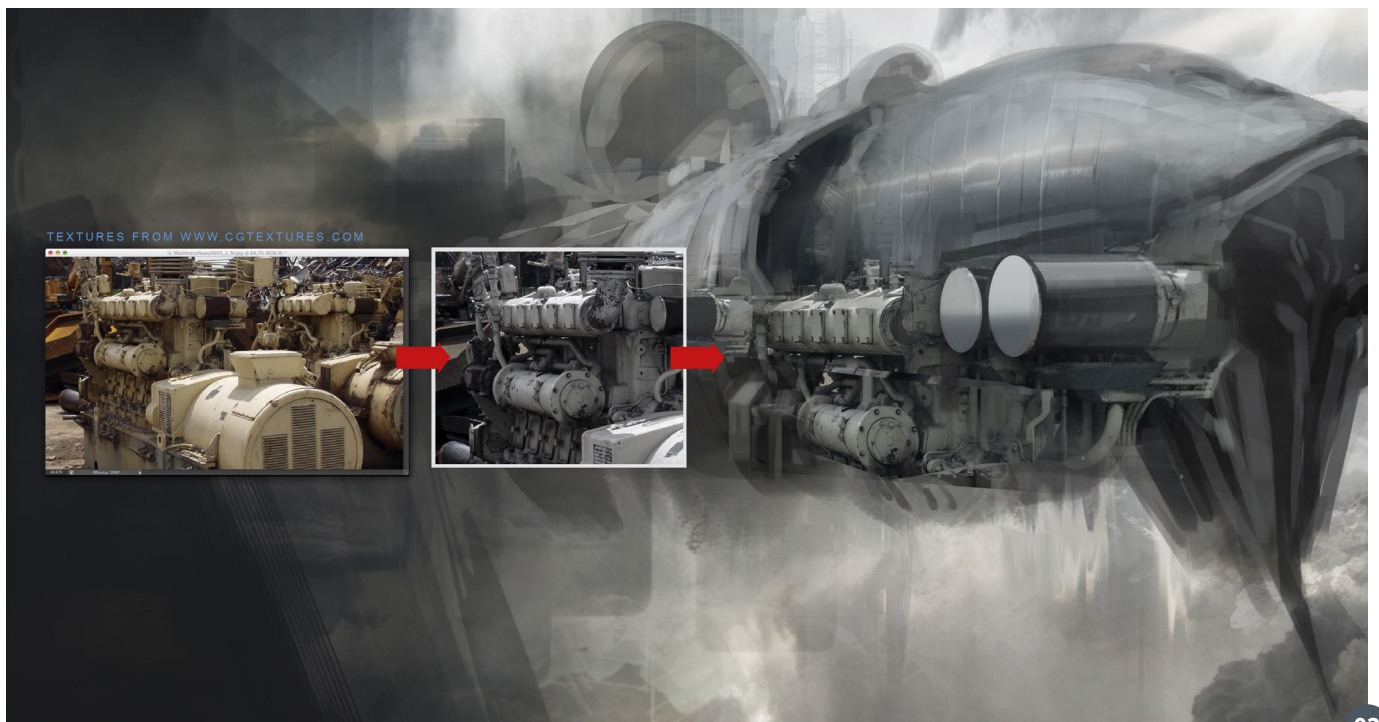
03

⚡ PRO TIP

. . . .

See what it takes to see

Even though mixing textures and strokes generate interesting reactions that we can take advantage of, we must be consistent and follow the main idea of the brief previously set out. Don't lose those ideas in the process.

TEXTURES FROM WWW.CGTEXTURES.COM

04

Generally before starting the design, I set the mood-board with all the visual information I need to apply to the concept. Those references will help me to understand exactly where to situate the elements to give the ship a real and believable structure. For example, if I place the engines and turbines near the crew cabin, it will bring a sensation of danger to the ship design – a feeling that I am not looking for.

It was also important to define the vanishing point of the image, as this helped me to place the elements in proportion.

03 Extraction: I then started to add detail to the front view of the ship – an area I wanted as the focal point. One important thing to remember was to increase the level of detail, but being careful not to over-detail one region. I had to build the whole vehicle up to keep the balance. When I extracted the key elements from the photos, I also needed to be careful about using regions of the photos that might bring a

little realism to the image, in this case the engines of the ship.

Before using the images I needed to set the light and values information of the original image and adapt it to the hue I already had in the image.

To achieve the colossal impression I wanted to transmit with the ark, I had to build a gigantic engine composed of smaller different parts, to give the sensation that it is a huge device that propels the ark in comparison with the small windows and crew cabins.

04 Environment: After getting a clear idea of the ark, I wanted to focus on the environment design; the location and space the ship inhabits.

First of all, I generated some structure shapes near the ship. Those structures later became the buildings and departures gates. Then I added some metallic materials to bring textural

information to the image – this allowed me to generate huge metallic architectural structures.

Those elements emphasized the ideas in my original concept and related nicely to the idea of a dystopian future with industrial cities built in the middle of chaos and pollution. ▶

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01 Establishing the volume, silhouette and perspective of the focal point

02 I brought together visual references and set the perspective

03 Adding detail to the focal point by using parts of photographs

04 Metallic textures give the sensation of a polluted and saturated environment

05 **Values:** In this step, I added a new black layer above all the other layers and set Saturation as a blending mode. This layer allowed me to see the image in grayscale, and consequently let me correct some regions of the image that had a lot of black or white information, in order to separate elements in different plains and silhouettes.

Having the control of the values gave the piece an accurate atmospheric perspective and so maintained the depth of the image.

06 **Color and light direction:** This was the point at which I emphasized the color of the image. What I did here was define some of the hues in a separate image. In this case I blended bluish and reddish tones to generate vibrancy, and then used the motion blur effect to blend the tones and look for the light direction in the image. Finally I arranged the image and started to experiment with different blending modes until finally finding the one that fitted.

In this step, I was also able to dye the shadows with some cool tones, and apply warm

desaturated tones to other areas of the image, which helped me to reinforce the impression of a polluted scene.

07 **Light details:** This is the moment in which the city came to life. In order to achieve this, I added some textures using images of cities. In this case, I thought that photographs at night brought different sizes of light and particles which allowed me to create a realistic atmosphere, and also helped me to approach a more cinematic context.

07

08

I carefully chose the regions of the photos that would work in my piece. I only needed one image to achieve this effect, but I had to repeat it in the right places, being careful not to over-saturate the image. However, I do prefer adding a little mess in my pieces. This effect can be achieved by using the following blending modes: Screen, Color Dodge, Soft Light or Overlay.

08 **Final touches and enhancing:** This is where I made the last touches to the image. Basically, I added some elements in the foreground to raise the sensation of depth in the piece. I used one of the elements as a vector and connected it with the ship in order to reinforce the focal point.

In addition, I added some tiny elements in the background and around the ship. Those little details all contributed to give an amazing sense of movement, and also help the city seem enormous – as a consequence the ship becomes even bigger.

Finally, I applied a depth of field effect in some areas of the piece to give a realistic feel to the piece; as a real camera does. I also added a sharpen effect to the ark in order to bring out all the details.

And my concept was done! I hope you enjoyed the process and I hope it will be useful and allow you to create your own worlds! ●

05 Addition of a black layer, with Saturation as a blending mode to define the plains

06 Reinforcing the color in the image by finding the right tones

07 Applying textures with different blending modes to bring to life the image

08 Adding some elements in the foreground to achieve a sense of depth and movement
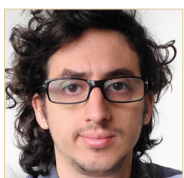
The Artist

JP Roldan
juanparoldan.blogspot.com

ROLDAN

The Artist

Gabriel Romero
gaboleps.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Gabriel Romero is a freelance illustrator and matte painter, working on projects for TV commercials, films and games. He is passionate about aero-modeling.

Develop your digital painting skills

Gabriel Romero shares his entire working process involved in creating his haunting image, *Waiting*. He reveals how he defines his sketch, as well as top tips on using photo references and techniques on painting with just three simple brushes! ▶

Discover how to use photo references to perfect your scene lighting...

I always try to paint something outside of work when I have some time to do it. This time I wanted to create an image where I could develop my creativity and exercise my painting skills.

I wanted to portray a situation of solitude and mystery, where this character doesn't know if she is dead or alive, so the idea was to represent a peaceful action and some kind of understanding attitude from her companions.

In this overview I will share the entire working process; from the first sketches to the final image. The process is mostly based on defining the sketch, and the painting technique is based on three simple brushes (Soft, Sharp, and Chalky) to paint the whole image. Many photo references were used, but no photo textures – just painting and working on the light.

01 **Gray spots:** At the beginning, without having a specific idea of what I was going to paint, I painted in some gray spots. I love starting a sketch with spots rather than lines because I have the possibility of generating an image or a story that I have no control over. It's about not thinking of what you are going to paint and just following your instinct. This step shouldn't take much time, so don't overwork it.

02 **Refining the spots:** When the spots formed something interesting and I saw a possible image taking shape, I began to define and create silhouettes from the painted spots. As I advanced, the spots became silhouettes, and

some characters and a very basic indication of mood appeared within the settings. ▶

---

01 This is also a nice exercise to relax

02 The first sketch containing the new character and atmosphere

⚡ PRO TIPS

The sketching process
Spend as much time as possible on the sketching process. And when you paint, enjoy it. If the sketch is well defined, you won't have many problems later.

Paint something outside work
Never quit painting something for pleasure. Work is great and sometimes there are very interesting projects to add to your portfolio, but it is also nice to paint something personal to exercise or challenge yourself.


01

02

03

"I photographed some still life models that I needed as reference"

03 **Checking composition:** Throughout the process I checked that the image was well composed from all points of view.

04 **Drawing some lines:** From the defined gray sketch I drew some lines running through the composition. Some are a reflection of what is already drawn and others show some mistakes in the sketch, so I made some adjustments to the composition.

05 **Trying different colors:** When I was satisfied with the composition, I tried some color choices. Not only dying the gray, but roughly painting in some color. I used an analogous color palette with a wide range, and a complementary color to contrast with the warmer color. I used a dark-blue contrasted with a red-orange that contrasted well with the blue without being complementary. To contrast the red-orange I used its complementary as a minor light source
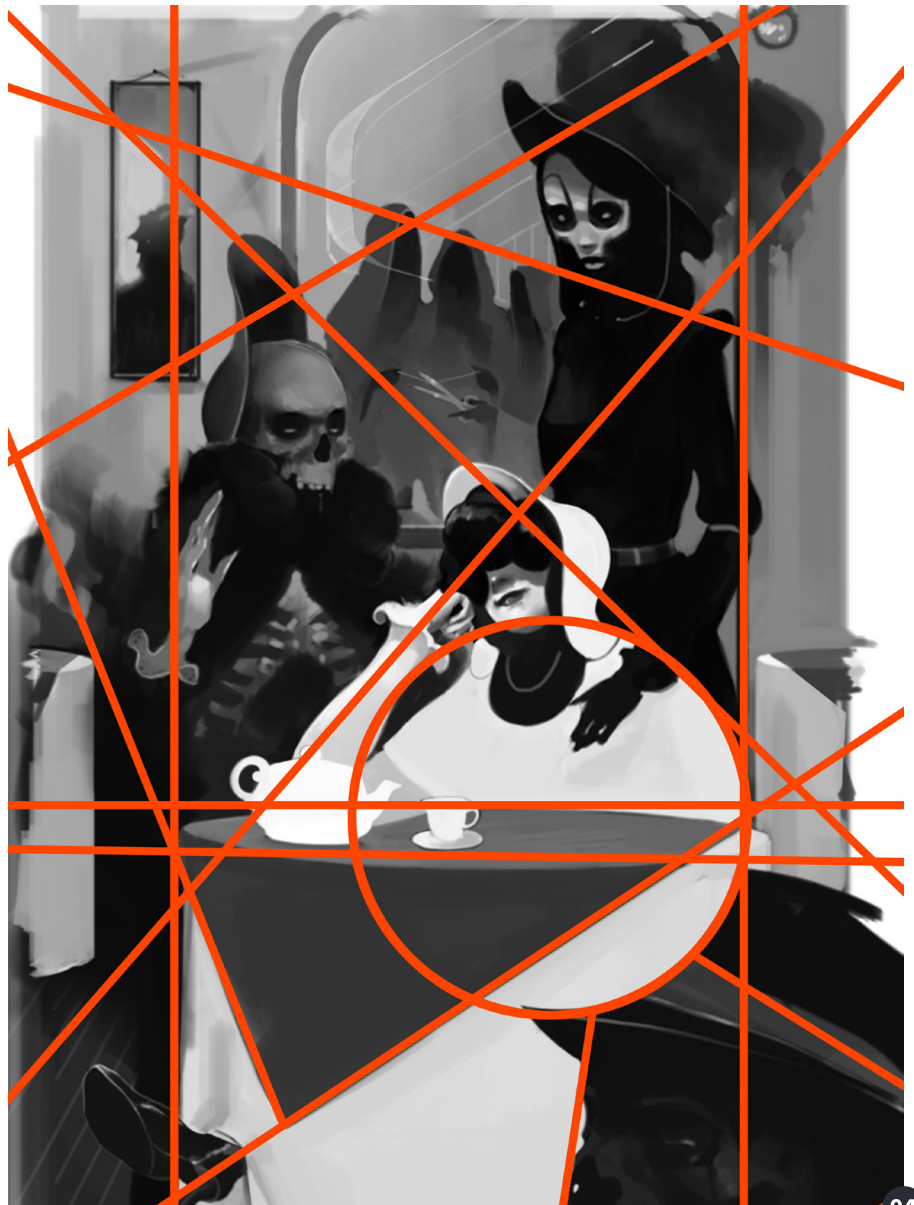
04

to crop silhouettes from the background in some of the areas.

06 **References:** I photographed some still life models that I needed as reference. The tablecloth has a strong presence in the picture, so I decided to make a basic still life that looked like what I was going to paint. I did the same with the hand, the teapot and the skull.

07 **Start to paint:** I started to paint in an unorganized way, but tried to pay attention to the image as a whole.

I limited my tools to three basic brushes and decided not to use photo textures.

It was interesting to see how light affected the fabric. It was very important to note that in folds the darkest area is where the illuminated area and more shaded area meet.

To paint the tablecloth I used a very basic Soft and Round brush and mixed light and shadow smoothly with the brush until I got a nice volume. ▶

---

03 Rotating and inverting the image lets us know if there is something wrong with the composition

04 Drawing lines helps create more interesting shapes

05 This technique gives you a rough idea about the colors you'll use

06 Search your house to find elements you can use as a photograph reference
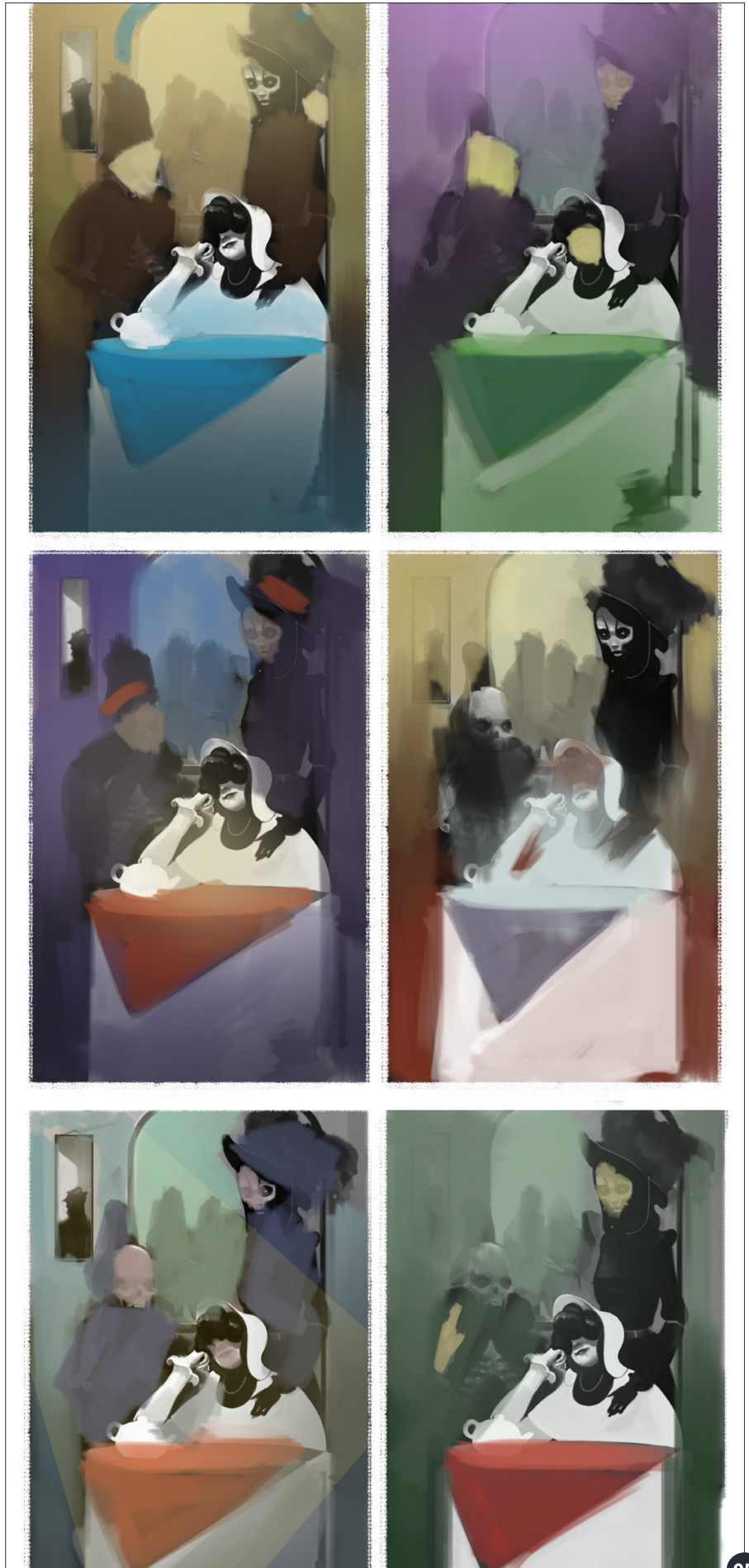
It is very important not to overwork any area, and detail only what is needed.

08 **Lighting the scene:** The references are very useful to see how light affects certain objects, but when we paint something from our imagination, new lighting effects appear.

In this image there is a main source of light coming from the upper-left edge of the composition that affects the three main characters. However, the main source of light bounces on the red-orange tablecloth and lights the characters up from below.

09 **Painting the portrait:** I decided to prepare a model in a similar pose so I could solve the structure of the head more easily and focus on the shading of the skin.

I chose to use a brush with a charcoal effect to produce a more interesting skin texture, and to avoid an airbrushed effect.

First, I worked on the illuminated areas, especially those affected by the bouncing light from the tablecloth, and then I began to shade the skin, minding the tones.

10 **Finishing and final filters:** I kept going with the rest of the elements. It is very important to stop at times and think about whether you are spending too much time on something minor or detailing it too much.

Finally, once I was happy with my work, I used adjustment layers and saturated color layers on Screen Blending mode to create a more interesting atmosphere. I applied the final filters (Sharpen, Lens Correction and Noise) and I considered it finished. ●

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07 With the sketch finished, and some references photographed, it is time to start painting

08 Red light bounces would affect the characters

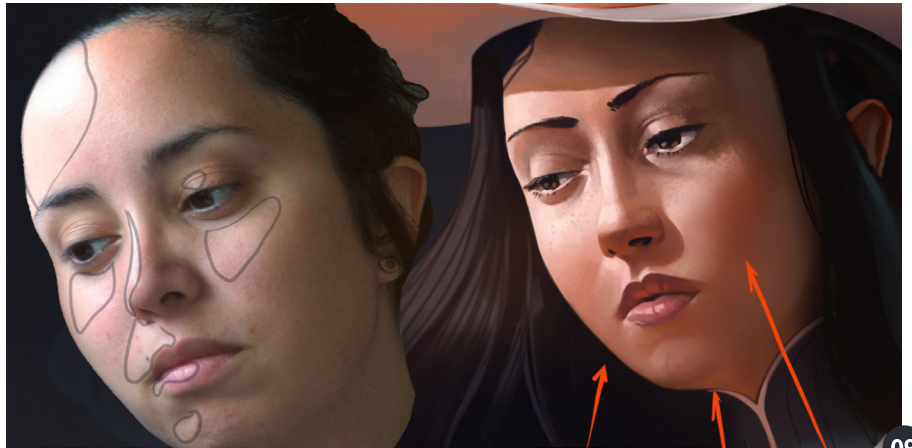**09** Gabriel's beautiful girlfriend was used as a model for the character

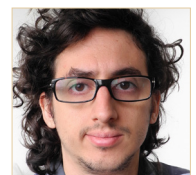**10** Painting without adjustment layers

The Artist

Gabriel Romero
gaboleps.com

Getting Started

It's usually a good idea to start with a simple sketch or a thumbnail to give yourself some idea of what you're doing, even if it's just a quick sketch for yourself. Everyone has their own way of getting their idea down; some will do line drawings, others do black-and-white value sketches or color sketches, and these are probably all good methods.

I happen to like doing simple value thumbnails (sometimes color) because they give me an idea of how the general composition will end up. This one was nothing special, but it was enough for me to see the larger shapes and values (**Fig.01**). If

> **"Because the values are so close together it's easy to move them around and change things. I usually find that the more time I spend during this stage, the better the image will end up."**

I had done this for a client then I would definitely want to take this a step further so it doesn't stretch the imagination.

Composition

I started with blocking in the background and trying to find the general tone of the image. All I knew at this stage was that I wanted it to be warm and desert-like. For some color separation I picked yellows and blues as starting colors, and then layered these using some generic brushes and the Smudge tool with some additional textured brushes (**Fig.02**).

Next I added the main silhouettes. I used a mask layer to keep them separate from the background and to keep things simpler for myself. I was mostly concerned with the general impression of the image at this stage. With the silhouettes in place and the temperature sorted, the piece was sort of working (**Fig.03**).

Color and details

You might notice that the colors and values are a little dull here; this is a constant struggle of mine as I often like to fade in my colors and shapes, so my work will often look a bit dull during the earlier stages.

To fix this I added some definition to the riders, worked some color variations into the background and started to think about what to do with the ugly foreground plane (**Fig.04**). This is where the problem-solving phase starts and it can go on for some time.

Because the values are so close together it's easy to move them around and change things.

I usually find that the more time I spend during this stage, the better the image will end up. With this one I didn't spend too long on this phase; it's just a personal image and I was trying to have fun with it. However, the worry that the colors were off and uneven was constantly nagging at me.

Contrast

I added some different colors using just the Levels, Curves and Hue tools. Soft Light can also work wonders when glazing an image, but it doesn't usually work if there is too much contrast. I felt that the red/brownish hue was an ▶

05

06

07

improvement as it created more contrast, which definitely helped the background, but I was unsure about the foreground (**Fig.05**).

To create more contrast and to create the impression of the sun shining, I increased the lighter tones behind the figures, which also helped define them more against the background. I also worked on the little things bothering me, like the bush in the foreground and the hat on the near figure (**Fig.06**).

Although the picture was coming together it still felt too monotonous. I tried several color variations to resolve this until I finally settled on a color scheme that felt better to me. I added some green to the blue in the mountain and sky, as well as changing the red and black to a more yellowish-brown tint, which seemed to do the trick as it had previously felt too pink. I used the Dodge tool to add some of the more obvious highlights, like the sun across the plain in the background and on the riders. I also added some

extra texture in the foreground and some light glinting off the stones, just to break it up a bit and add variance (**Fig.07**).

It still looked rough, but felt finished somehow – like a finished sketch. I could have picked at it for longer, but usually once I've solved most of the big problems I will lose interest in an image, especially if it's just a small thing I'm doing for myself. All in all, I think it turned out alright. ●

The Artist

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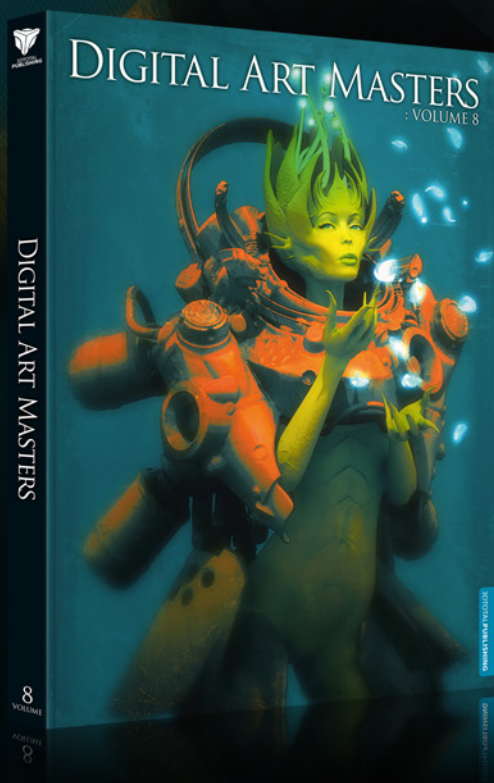
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